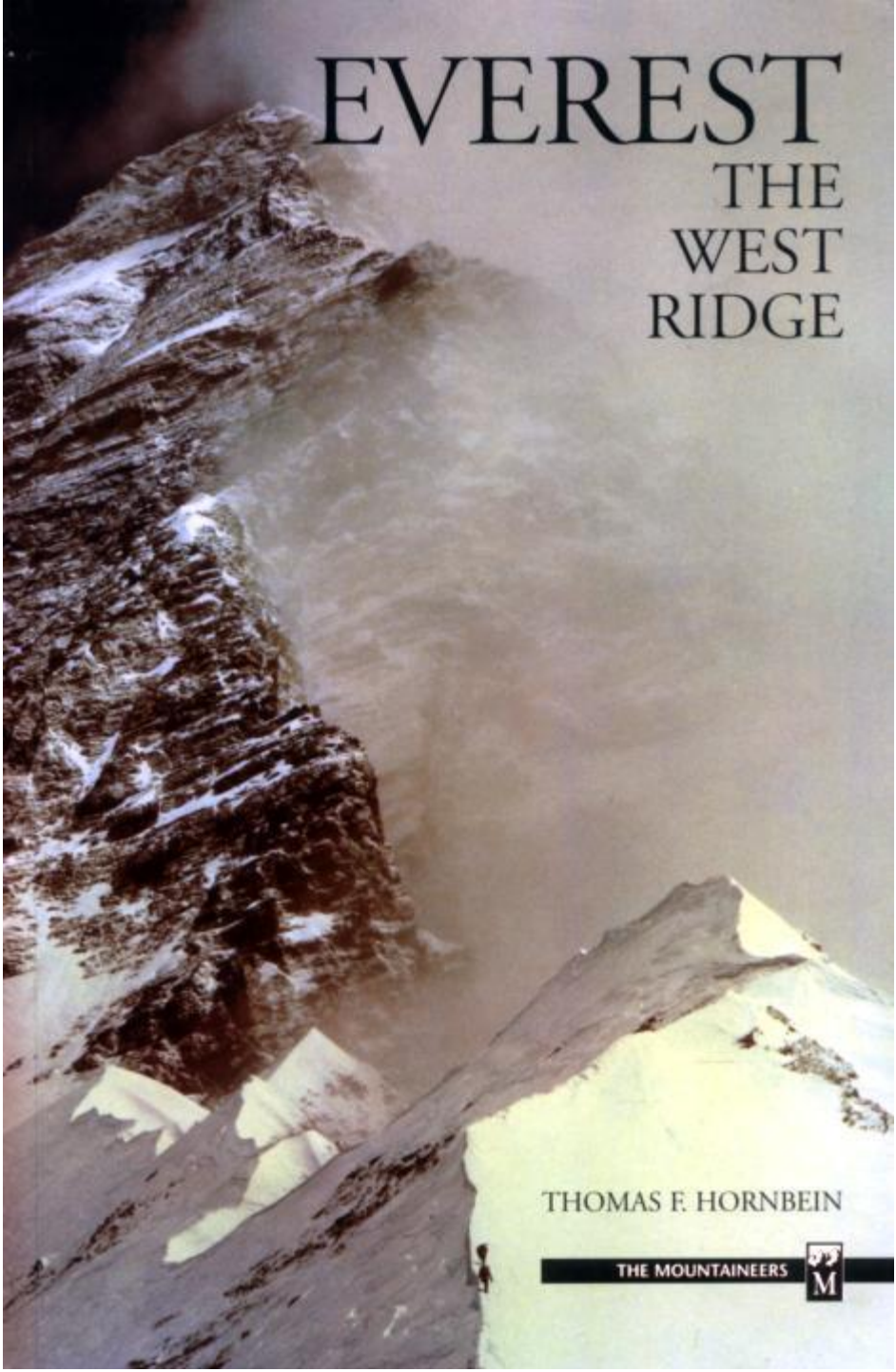
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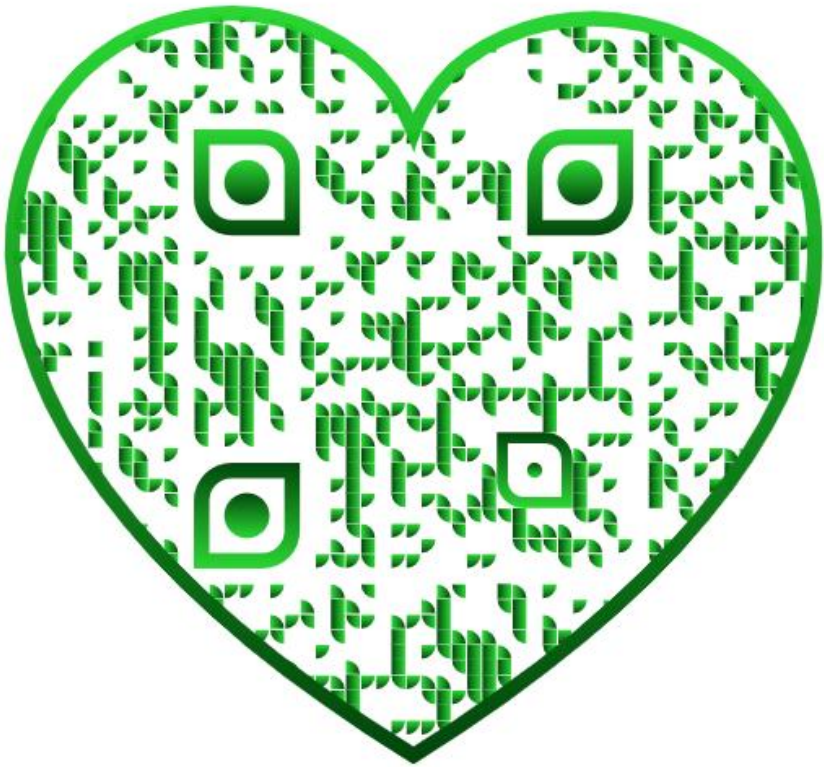

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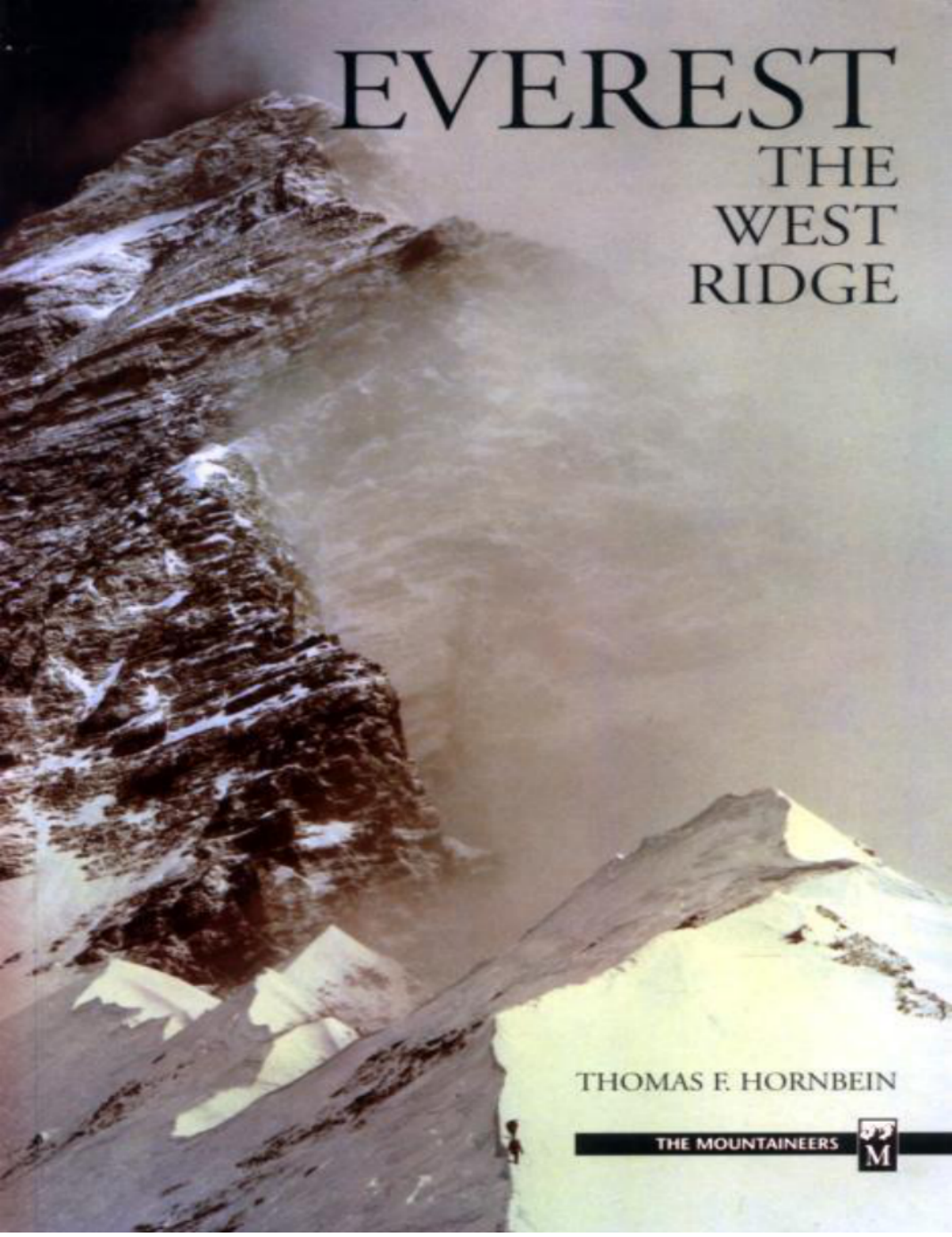

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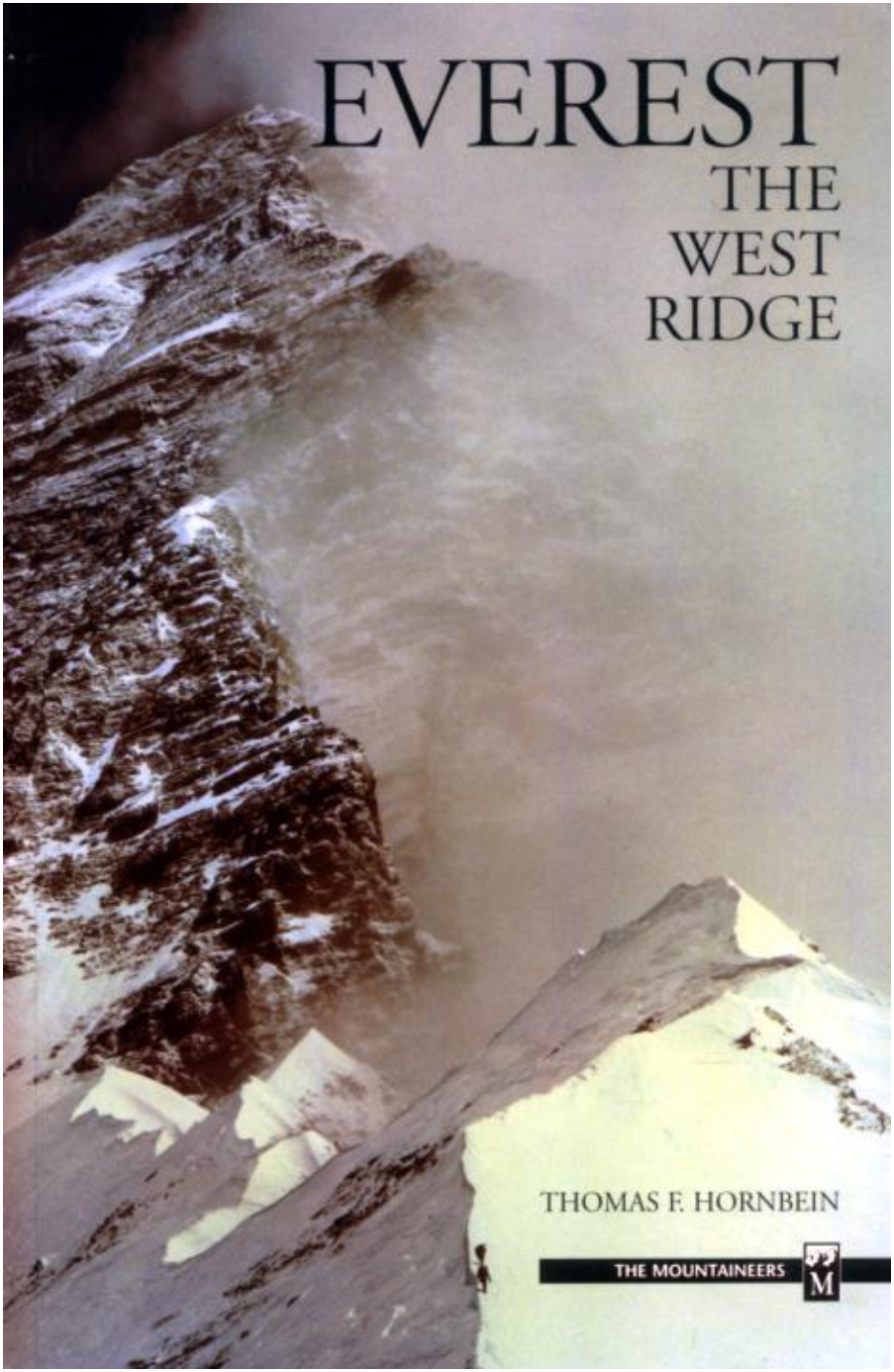
EVEREST
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THE MOUNTAINEERS

EVEREST

The West Ridge

By THOMAS E HORNBEIN

FOREWORD BY DOUG SCOTT

THE MOUNTAINEERS

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To all of us who knew Willi and Dick, with love.

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... Everest rises, not so much a peak as a prodigious mountain mass. There is no complication for the eye. The highest of the world's great mountains, it seems, has to make but a single gesture of magnificence to be lord of all, vast in unchallenged and isolated supremacy. To the discerning eye, other mountains are visible, giants between twenty-three and twenty-six thousand feet high. Not one of their slenderer heads even reaches their chief's shoulder; beside Everest they escape notice: such is the pre-eminence of the greatest.

-GEORGE LEIGH MALLORY

Foreword

In 1920, Sir Charles Bell, the British Resident in Lhasa, received the first permission for climbers to visit Mount Everest. In the intervening six decades, several thousand men and women have set foot on the mountain, and just over one hundred of them have reached its summit. Over the years the style of climbing has "progressed" on Everest just as on lower mountains. Climbing is seen to evolve wherever more difficult routes are attempted, and whenever climbers climb these routes in a more adventurous style, as for example in smaller groups and with less equipment. On Everest the emphasis until recently has been less on style than on pioneering new routes.

There are now routes via the South Col, the West Ridge, the North Col, the Southwest Face, and the West Ridge Direct. These, however, were not necessarily ascended in order of difficulty, for on Everest, straddling the Tibetan-Nepalese border, international politics often determined which routes were accessible at any particular time.

Interesting lines remain, mostly on the Tibetan side of the border: the Northeast Ridge, the Kangshung Face and the Northwest Face. Several parties have considered the somewhat amorphous South Buttress that bounds the Southwest Face on its right, but so far no serious attempt has been made. There is obviously room on Everest to pioneer new and more difficult routes.

The evolution encompasses climbing style as well as difficulty. The original South Col route was naturally the first climbed in the premonsoon season, when the weather conditions are relatively favorable. The first postmonsoon ascent of this route was made in late October of 1973 by a Japanese expedition. The first winter ascent has just been accomplished; during January and February of 1980 Polish climbers battled appalling gales and cold until two climbers put in the effort that took them through to the summit and back. The four young climbers who, without any other support, attempted Everest in 1962 (Woodrow Wilson Sayre, Four Against Everest) made a significant contribution to style, although that event was ahead of its time and the participants did not have previous Himalayan experience. Now that other major Himalayan peaks, including K2 and Kangchenjunga, have been safely and successfully climbed in lightweight style with minimum use of fixed ropes and oxygen, the scene is set for alpine or near alpine ascents of Everest.

The first oxygenless ascent via the South Col in 1978 by Messner and Habeler was a big step forward, one that will be to the ultimate benefit of Alpine-style climbing in the Himalaya now it is known that a well-acclimatized person may find the extra weight of the oxygen bottles a burden not offset by their contents. Everest has yet to be climbed without oxygen being used by support parties, and it is likely that climbers will wish to climb new routes without oxygen. It is only a matter of time before a lone climber combines the drive with the skill and endurance to make the first solo ascent of Everest. The evolution of style is the search for new challenges as climbers reach for the limits to which they can go.

In fitting the climbs that have taken place on Everest into the category of difficulty, we are apt to overemphasize present and future achievements and overlook much of that which has been "surpassed." We are also likely to ignore other, less apparent aspects of climbing that are central to this high adventure. For instance, attaining the summit by a new route and in impeccable style is of tremendous importance to sponsors, the leader, the support party, and the successful climbers, as well as to climbers everywhere. But often the summit merely defines a high point on the journey up and down the mountain, where it is the struggle to achieve or merely survive that may be a truer measure of the accomplishment. This struggle does not necessarily take place on the summit, or only during successful attempts.

It is impossible to measure the heroic exertions that have taken place over the years on the flanks of Everest and to suggest that one effort was more heroic than another. Right from the start in the early 1920's a few climbers periodically have found themselves at the limits of what was presumed to be physically, physiologically or psychologically possible. It must have always been pretty much the same limits, the same sort of struggle. The only difference has been one of time and place, for on each occasion that the frontiers of the possible were transcended, the psychological barriers were lowered and climbers pushed on to the next horizon, often aided by improved equipment, strategy, and technique. As measured by actual risk and commitment, there has been no evolution, the spirit of adventure remaining more or less constant over the years and on all sides of the mountain.

In 1963, however, the West Ridge of Everest was climbed by Hornbein and Unsoeld, who then went on to traverse the mountain for the first and only time. This was, on account of the greater commitment demanded of them, an exceptional tour de force and is

well described in this book. How does this West Side story fit into the sixty-year history of Everest? On close examination, it moves into a class all its own, for it was here perhaps more than on other climbs that a point of no return was reached, and a total commitment made. On other summit attempts, the climbers knew that in an emergency they had but to retrace their route of ascent back down, often down fixed ropes, to support camps. But when Willi Unsoeld and Tom Hornbein left their top camp, they had to pass over more then 2,000 feet of unknown ground with all the accompanying little worries of where to belay or bivouac, how steep the rock steps were, what the limits of their own powers of endurance were. There was no fixed rope above 25,100 feet and the higher they went the more it became apparent that abseil points were nonexistent, that their only chance lay in "topping out" and climb ing down the Southeast Ridge to the South Col.

When the decision was made (or perhaps made for them?) to go for it. all negative thoughts and feelings stopped. Now that the way was clear, they tapped hidden reservoirs of energy. Now that all backward thoughts had ceased there was "no fear, no worry, no strangeness." Now that the die was cast, they set out along the summit ridge of all Asia down into the night shadows and the terrible cold of a 28,000-foot open bivouac. Here they survived, caring not only for each other, but also for two exhausted colleagues. These were exceptional men.

A price of climbing in Himalayan style is that only part of the expedition has a chance to reach the summit. The rest are forced to invest their own desires for the realization of something more worthy and lasting. This was the case on the West Ridge, where team spirit is seen at its best. The positive energy generated by Dick Emerson, Al Auten, Barry Corbett, and the Sherpas during the final buildup went to the top with Hornbein and Unsoeld. Really there was a bit of all of us up there; the rather sizable bit that wants to know what we do not know about the world we live in, but mostly seeks to know about ourselves.

The struggle here is out in the open, a symbol of all our strivings condensed into one tidy, supreme effort. From it all comes a feeling of reassurance.

Doug Scott

March, 1980

You are reminded that each man is unique. We are compounded of

dust and the light of a star, Loren Eiseley says; and if you look hard at the frontispiece, Barry Bishop's photograph of Tom Hornbein and Willi Unsoeld approaching the West Ridge-if you keep looking at it as I have in the course of putting this book together, you will be able to see something phenomenal. They have climbed off the foreground snow by now, so you must look high, on the rock just below the summit. It isn't too hard for an imaginative person to see there a momentary pulsing of a pinpoint of light.

The light of a star. What is it that enables dust to carry it there? How could an impossibly complicated array of cells ever organize at all, much less seek out such a place to go? This inclination to inquire, this drive to go higher than need be, this innate ability to carry it off, this radiance in the heart when it happens, however brief in the infinite eternity, whether you do it, or I, or Tom and Willi, makes us grateful for the genius that man has and for the beautiful planet he has to live on.

DAVID BROWER

September 9, 1965

from Foreword to First Edition

One of the misfortunes of advancing age is that you get out of touch with the sunrise. You take it for granted, and it is over and done with before you settle yourself for the daily routine. That is one reason, I think, why, when we grow older, the days seem shorter. We miss the high moments of their beginning.

-JOHN BUCHAN

(Lord 7iveedsmuir)

Preface to the New Edition

The events recounted in this book took place half a lifetime ago. Sometimes, feeling like a surrogate for a former self, I wonder if I was really there. In this present moment of Everestmania, reminders of the reality of having been there come unrelentingly, daily. In the original preface, I wrote with prescience, "Everest was not a private affair. It belongs to many men."

Much has changed since 1963. The mountain has changed. Not in any noticeable geological way, yet the lammergeiers circling overhead cannot help but note increased numbers of tiny, multicolored creatures clinging to its flanks. Notoriety has altered Everest's interface with man in ways that are the fate for all attractive mountains. The discovery of a high mountain leads to explorations to it from which a route to the summit can be contemplated. Initial attempts ultimately result in the first ascent. The next phase is the testing of limits: more difficult routes, hostile seasons, an aesthetically purer style, such as the fast, light-weight, do-it-yourself Alpine-style ascents without Sherpa support and without the use of supplemental oxygen. The seminal event of this phase was Reinhold Messner's 1980 solo ascent of Everest's north face without the use of supplemental oxygen. Dick Emerson would have explained that these evolutions keep the outcome uncertain and motivation, therefore, at a maximum. Each pushes the envelope of possibility and thereby increases accessibility for future wanderers as well as the stakes for those with a creative flair.

Because Everest is the highest, it has become a magnet for climbers of many nationalities, of a widening range of abilities, who can test themselves and come home (if they are fortunate) wearing a small mantle of notoriety. With Dick Bass's ascent in 1985, guided climbing came to Everest, as it has to all other major mountains of the world. The easier ways up the highest mountain on earth could be traveled, with appropriate support, by those less experienced if physically fit, motivated, and sufficiently affluent.

In recent years the base camp beside the Khumbu Glacier has become a small city of tents filled with hundreds of would-be Everest summiters from all over the world, supported by a large number of Sherpas. The goal now is to get not just a few, but rather all members of a group to the top. By this year's end, ascents of Everest should have passed 1,000. The numbers, especially of climbers with lesser

experience, add a new, complex dimension to the sociology of climbing on Everest-and to the risk. When Willi and I headed toward the summit on May 22, 1963, we were alone. We had only ourselves to depend on and worry about. Our disconnection from loved ones and support added an uneasy seasoning to our effort. Now, with crowds common near the top of Everest on a fine spring day, too many perceive that help is at hand. This feeling of security lures driven but less-experienced individuals into situations where they lack the ability and judgment to manage by themselves. Other's lives (and aspirations) are put at risk when a humanitarian need to assist arises. In addition, numbers bring queues with delays sometimes of an hour or more at bottlenecks like the Hillary Step as one waits one's turn to go up or down. Getting up and getting down expeditiously is a time-honored precept of safe mountaineering; standing immobilized invites disaster.

Everest has caught the attention of the general public. The tragic events that unfolded in the spring of 1996, as told in accounts such as Jon Krakauer's powerful, introspective bestseller Into Thin Air, are part of the reason. Another contributor to what one anthropologist has referred to as the "new Everest boom" is the immediacy that modern satellite communication brings to what once was one of the most isolated places on earth, a near real-time window on the game being played out.

My feelings about this new Everest are mixed. My mind acknowledges the inevitability of what has come about, but my soul sorrows at the evolution, and regrets that a precious spiritual element of adventure is largely gone from this highest place on earth. I am thankful for having been born when I was, and having been in the right place at the right time.

We survivors of this adventure are 35 years older, no bolder, a little slower. Of our team of twenty, eight are dead. When I wrote the preface for the second edition in 1980, I ached from Willi Unsoeld's death on Mount Rainier a year earlier. Willi and Dick Emerson, who died three years later of cancer, remain a vital part of my life, even though I cannot argue with them anymore. Jake Breitenbach was killed in the Icefall. Jim Ullman and Dan Doody died soon after the expedition. More recent subtractions were Barry Prather, Barry Bishop, and Jimmy Roberts. Barry Bishop's camera caught the special moment that is the cover of this book. We who remain climb on-at least metaphorically. Everest has changed our destiny.

Only in the last couple of decades have I appreciated, or at least

acknowledged to myself, that mountains formed my life. Early on I discovered that tree- and house-climbing in Saint Louis paled in comparison to the peaks and cliffs of the Rocky Mountains. My love of rock translated into a geology major at the University of Colorado, where climbing led to mountain rescue, rescue to first aid. After my junior year, I decided to apply to medical school. I imagined being a general practitioner in a mountain town in Colorado or Wyoming, but a medical school dedicated to training specialists soon disabused me of this goal. In spare moments I began to read about humans at high altitude and wondered why people responded physiologically as they did. My professor of surgery suggested specializing in anesthesiology as a way to combine my interest in caring for people with an academic career in physiologic research.

I returned from Everest in 1963 to my first real job, as a member of the faculty at the University of Washington School of Medicine. I confronted the future full of uncertainty. Would I succeed in my academic aspirations as a clinician, teacher, and scientist, or would I forever be tagged as just the "doc who climbed Everest"? For many years I tried to separate my medical and mountain worlds.

Aging has allowed me to accept my accomplishments as well as my limitations. Now I understand that mountains and medicine are warp and weft of the same cloth. From mountains I learned many lessons that defined me and my relationship with those around me: my medical and scientific colleagues, my students, my climbing companions and other friends, my wife and children, and others whose lives this book touched in unexpected ways.

Climbing mountains, especially the risky Himalayan variety, is a selfish proposition. Yet I believe that something of value comes from this seemingly useless pursuit. As I worked and learned and taught as a physician practicing a high-risk critical care specialty, I found that risk is an essential ingredient to life. The ability to accept uncertainty enables one to stay cool during crisis. The willingness to risk also underpins discovery: creativity in science or art or other ventures into the unknown. Finally, accepting that outcomes are commonly uncertain and failure often possible (for that is inherent in the definition of risk) allows us as a society to better cope with the challenges that confront us in what we do to our planet and each other.

The climbing of mountains also gives us heroes who we might look up to and strive to emulate. My boyhood was replete with heroes. A little uncomfortably, I find myself cast in this role by others as this

event acquires its niche in the history of mountaineering. I also discover that heroes are as important to me now as they were in my youth. Heroes are for all ages.

I now realize that this book is about accepting risk, and pursuing dreams. Perhaps its greatest value is not so much as a historical description of a Himalayan climb, but as a metaphor for a precious piece of life.

T. Hornbein

Seattle, Washington

April 13, 1998

Preface to the Second Edition

A few days ago a news report carried a story that jolted my fondest fantasies. A Chinese mountaineer, Wang Hung Pao, who had been a member of that country's successful ascent of Everest from the north side in 1975, was killed recently in an avalanche while reconnoitering for a joint Sino-Japanese attempt by the direct North Face. Prior to his death he had communicated to a Japanese teammate, Ryoten Hasegawa, that in 1975, high on the limestone slabs near Everest's Northeast Ridge, he had found the body of a man, garbed in tattered, decaying clothing of the English mountaineering style of half a century ago. Might this be the body of George Leigh Mallory or his companion, Andrew Irvine, who were last seen by Noel Odell heading toward the summit on the morning of June 8, 1924? That they might be preserved in substance more than myth was at once disappointing and exciting. Were a camera to be found, would it provide an answer to the tantalizing question whether they reached the summit before coming to grief?

This event lends counterpoint to my mood as I write in the early dawn of the first anniversary of Willi Unsoeld's death in an avalanche on Mount Rainier. Willi has been as much in my thought this last year as before he died. I suspect it may ever be so, for like Mallory, there is a permanence to what he left us that lingers fadeproof as a fine photo. Yet, writing these words for a new edition seventeen years after our climb, I find myself almost dispassionate (but not quite; the tears still come at unexpected moments) as I look back at the toll that seems part of the price of a love affair with mountains. Willi would say you have to look death in the eyeball to really live. Sometimes it stares you down. Jake Breitenbach died in the Icefall on Everest; Dan Doody in a fall ice climbing Mount Washington soon after; Marc Emerson, Dick and Pat's sixteen-year-old son, in a fall while rock climbing almost a decade ago; Nanda Devi Unsoeld in Willi's arms high on the mountain for which she was named, two-and-a-half years before her father's death. There is more, but to what end? I look back across sorrow seeking the rationalization to justify the loss. It is simple. There is no choice. The addiction is one we all shared, the risks more or less appreciated, the joys and depth of togetherness transcendent. We, who remain and remember, go on, our inspiration and vitality mellowed but intact, enriched by moments intensely shared and now an element of our living memory.

Willi was 52 at the time of his death. The Old Guide was attempting

to extract himself and a group of Evergreen College students from a taste of winter mountaineering high on Mount Rainier. He had wobbled up there on a couple of artificial hip joints that had recently replaced the originals, which he had pounded to the point where they spoke their pain too loudly back at him. Descending in blowing snow, the first rope of four was caught by an avalanche that lacked the blustering benignity of one that Willi and I shared on Masherbrum in 1960. Willi and Janie Diepenbrock were too deeply buried

Willi lived life and preached it close to the edge. He used his years to the hilt and his impact on the world around him was a potent one. Over the years, he touched many lives, especially young ones. I have tried on several occasions lately to encapsulate on paper my view of the essence of Unsoeld. The ambition proved ill-conceived. There were too many essences, and their total turned out to be too crazily vast. That may be part of Willi's plan, for he had an uncannily slippery way of provoking questions in others without blowing his own cover. Dick Emerson described it thusly in last year's American Alpine journal:

> So I am left as perplexed as always. Is there some central principle which held the many parts of Willi Unsoeld together? A principle that will help me comprehend him as a single, mortal man? I have been trying for years to find it, to "figure Willi out"; and every time I thought I was getting close he changed before my very eyes.
>
> It was a game we played between us. Willi, always searching for the key to his own character, knew that I was looking for it too; so he made the search into a game we played together. ("Willi," I once said, "if you'll just hold that pose a minute more, I'll have you figured out; then I'll tell you all about you." My grin met his roaring guffaw, the one we can still all hear. "Di-i-ck! Do you really think I would let that happen? I'll change before I let you figure me out!" I thought I had him then. "There's the answer, Willi. You just did it again. You always compete, whether on a climbing rope or in this `search for self'! You're more interested in beating me to the answer than you are in the answer itselfl You would rather compete with me, than acquire all those virtues you like to call `self-knowledge'!" Willi returned my grin, and he spoke softly for maximum effect: "Perhaps, ... Just maybe. But competition takes two. So, now, Dick, let's talk about you!" Zap! Try again tomorrow.)

The Unsoeld that I find in The West Ridge still feels real seventeen years later, just incomplete. For most of us this adventure occurred at

the beginning of our efforts to identify and realize our aspirations. For Willi, I believe, Everest was not high on the list. Another good climb, an essential seasoning to life, but not an ultimate challenge. Willi extracted a lot of mileage from the accomplishment and the notoriety, but it was mostly as a means to an end. He used Everest as a magnificent metaphor, actually multiple metaphors. "Outward Bound" on Everest was one, the theme to reach beyond one's known limits, only he expressed his philosophy more powerfully and flamboyantly. The mountain became a medium for messages about such things as human striving, closeness and interrelationships, and the ecological assault on fragile environments. Everest provided Willi a visibility that he used to help accomplish the goals he set for himself, which amounted to provoking the rest of us to reexamine our philosophies of life to broaden our view of the world, and to learn to live in it with minimal trauma to the substrate or to each other.

I would guess none of us who were part of that 1963 expe dition were left unaltered by it, for better or (and?) worse. Not so much by the climb itself, for that must have been a sense of incompleteness, of what might have been, of dreams unfulfilled. For a few the notoriety could be parlayed into recognition, either as an end in itself, or as a means to other ends, as Willi was quick to recognize. For me, this visibility seemed a liability as I returned from climbing Everest to begin my academic career as an anesthesiologist and physiologist. I feared being ever "the doc who climbed Everest," and this concern added to the many doubts associated with the transition from the isolated simplicity of the mountain world to the more nebulous one of real life.

Perhaps I am haunted still by those searchings with which that adventure ended, for I have willfully and pleasurably, traded off one sort of challenge for another. The current one, directing an academic anesthesia program, asks the same commitment and caring as climbing a mountain. There are occasions totally analogous to climbing out of a warm sleeping bag before dawn and into frozen boots. The pace must of necessity be a bit slower, for the task is measured in years rather than days or weeks or months. Moments of sorrow and joy related to the rise and fall of the tide of lives and friendships are similar, as are the risks, uncertainty, and resulting motivations. A difference is the lack of a clear simple endpoint, both literally and figuratively. Success is ill-defined, rarely absolute, and therefore, even more than with the climbing of a mountain, the pleasure is perhaps more in the playing than in the view from the top. And that is what makes tomorrow so enticing.

I shall not explore these intervening years further. They are after-Everest parts of our individual lives and while influenced by the event, sometimes profoundly, are not relevant to the story being resurrected here. This new edition, though, deserves some comment, for it too bears the stamp of time and change. Both rising costs and the loss of plates makes replication of the original Exhibit Format version an impossibility. We have salvaged a few of the more cherished (by me) quotes and started from scratch on the photographs. The pictorial orientation is now more toward the climb than the beauty of the approach march, and here Willi's camera was particularly busy. The Emersons, Jolene Unsoeld, and Hornbeins combed our collections, added a few favorites from Jim Lester, and borrowed from the original "lecture" set. Unfortunately for too many from this last source, I have not been able to identify the photographer. The other new element of this edition is Doug Scott's perception of the evolution of mountaineering style on Everest and where this 1963 climb of the West Ridge fits in the larger and ever growing history ofThe Mountain that Doug knows better than most. His own several journeys to the Southwest Face culminated in 1975 in its successful ascent by Doug and Dougal Haston. Doug is now struggling with a history of Everest, which according to the latest reckoning has seen 105 pairs of feet upon its summit since it rose from the sea. But that is a tale I shall leave for Doug to tell.

Tom Hornbein

Seattle, Washington

March 4, 1980

Preface

Climbing Everest is one thing, writing about it quite another. Still the reasons for writing seemed compelling enough to overcome doubts of my ability and a yearning for the privacy a mountaineer tends to prize so highly. Besides which, as I soon learned, Everest was not a private affair. It belonged to many men.

And so therefore did our story. Realizing this, I found myself challenged to convey something of the less dramatic but more deeply meaningful reality of an expedition, using the climb not as an end in itself but as a stage on which men could act, and interact.

This is the West Ridge story. It is only a small part of what was accomplished by the American Mount Everest Expedition, but the rest-the two ascents by way of the South Col route, the scientific endeavours-has been told elsewhere, most powerfully by James Ramsey Ullman in Americans on Everest. Hopefully his account will justify my gross omissions. To narrow scope even further, this is a personal account, seen through the eyes, and the bias, of one of a team of twenty. Obviously much more could be said, but the West Ridge is all that I personally experienced; it is all that I am qualified to write about.

My goal is to place the drama, the hardship, the toiling up windswept heights into a setting of day-to-day reality, a setting of grubby unbathed living, of hours of sweaty boredom and moments of fun or aloneness for introspection, a setting where men are human beings, nothing more ... and nothing less.

In this sense a mountaineering expedition is like a marriage. Close living for many weeks rubs away the veneer. A man may appear before his companions burdened by an excess of faults and annoying habits that challenge the joy of daily living. Weaknesses show, but also strengths; personal ambitions, but also the ability to compromise. The result, to my taste, is always for the better, and when the team is right (here the skill came in Norman's choosing) the experience becomes more meaningful day by day.

Stress is inevitable in such a situation, particularly when goals diverge. To ignore disagreement and the ability of individuals to forge from compromise that which was accomplished is to ignore much of the accomplishment. This is what I have attempted to portray.

The story is written as I experienced it at the time, not as I feel looking back upon it now. In recapturing feelings and reconstructing events, in separating fact from bias, I have been helped immensely by my diary and letters home and by tape recordings of radio conversations and group discussions made during the expedition. Most of the dialogue of group discussions and all the radio conversations on the mountain are taken directly from these tapes with editing only where necessary for clarity and pace.

In many ways the writing of this book resembles the climbing of the mountain it is about. It was difficult, and, like Everest, it remained so to the last. It evoked the same pleasurable feelings of finality as the end came near. And, like the climbing of Everest, this account results from the work and caring of many besides myself.

Norman Dyhrenfurth started it by conceiving the expedition. His dream brought reality to the dreams of those who joined him. He will have to sense my gratitude for the opportunity, for words cannot do it justice.

In the writing Dick Emerson has provided a constant and solid belay. He shared generously of his own ideas and carried my thoughts to depths that would otherwise have remained unplumbed. His wife, Pat, typed and edited incisively. She and Twink Stern tried to keep my writing honest with my philosophies, as best they could understand either. Joan Green typed early in the game when the idea was still a fear, and Chuck Huestis helped to tie loose ends as the effort neared completion. Dave Brower's confidence when there was little cause for confidence and his skill in polishing what finally came were still less than his contribution of his son, Ken, who helped put chaos in order when time grew short. To all these people I owe far more than thanks.

And to the team, about whom this story is written. Though some are here more than others, in the event of which this is just a small part such distinctions did not exist.

Seattle
September 17, 1965

T. H.

Chronology

1963

February 3: Bulk of Expedition departs San Francisco by air.

February 13: Arrive Kathmandu, Nepal.

February 20: Depart Kathmandu, begin march from Banepa to Panchkal on first day.

February 21: Panchkal to Dolalghat. Jim Ullman returns to Kathmandu.

March 5: Puijan.

March 9-14: Thyangboche, 13,000 feet, for acclimatization.

March 16-19: Lobuje, 16,ooo feet, for more acclimatization.

March 21: Base Camp established at head of Khumbu Glacier, 17,8oo feet.

March 22: First probe into Icefall by Nawang Gombu, Lute Jerstad, Willi Unsoeld and Jim Whittaker.

March 23: Jake Breitenbach killed.

April 2: Advance Base established in Western Cwm at 21,350 feet.

April 7-13: Reconnaissance of West Ridge to 25,100 feet by Barry Bishop, Dave Dingman, Tom Hornbein, Willi Unsoeld.

April 16: South Col, 26,200 feet, reached by Lute Jerstad, Dick Pownall, Chotari, and Nima Tenzing; one month earlier than past expeditions.

April 16-May 13: Winch operations on West Shoulder by A] Auten, Barry Corbet, Dick Emerson, Willi Unsoeld, Tashi, and Nima Tenzing.

April 27: First South Col team of Ang Dawa, Norman Dyhrenfurth, Nawang Gombu, and Jim Whittaker depart Advance Base for the summit.

April 28: Second South Col team of Barry Bishop, Girmi Dorje, Lute Jerstad, and Dick Pownall starts up.

April 29: Final support and Lhotse team of Dave Dingman and Barry Prather leave Advance Base.

May i : Nawang Gombu and Jim Whittaker reach the summit of Everest at i Y.M. by way of the South Col route. Very high winds. Norman Dyhrenfurth and Ang Dawa in photographic support reach 28,000 feet before returning to Camp VI. All four spend a second night in high camp before going down.

May 2: All parties descend, second summit team helping the first team down from the South Col.

May 15: Camp 4W established, 25,100 feet, at base of West Ridge.

May 16-17, night of: Windstorm flattens Camp 4W. Al Auten, Barry Corbet, Tom Hornbein, and Willi Unsoeld retire to 3W to find Dick Emerson who has spent the night bivouacking in a crevasse on way up to 3W.

May 18-19: West Ridgers recuperate at 3 W while Barry Bishop and Lute Jerstad, then Dave Dingman and Girmi Dorje depart Advance Base for South Col.

May 20: West Ridgers reoccupy Camp 4W.

May 21 : Barry Bishop-and Lute Jerstad to Camp VI, 27,450 feet, above South Col. Long carry from Camp 4W to establish 5W at 25,250 feet. Route pioneered by Barry Corbet and Al Auten. Carry by Ang Dorje, Ila Tsering, Passang Tendi, Tenzing Nindra, and Tenzing Gyalsto. Dick Emerson, Tom Hornbein, and Willi Unsoeld come last.

May 22: Barry Bishop and Lute Jerstad reach summit of Everest via South Col route at 3:30 P.M. Willi Unsoeld and Tom Hornbein arrive three hours later up West Ridge, then descend toward South Col. The two parties unite after dark and spend night out at 28,000 feet.

May 23 : The four descending are met by Dave Dingman and Girmi Dorje above Camp VI, then led by Dave Dingman down to Advance Base, arriving at 10:30 P.M.

May 24: Last of Expedition descends to Base Camp.

May 26: Barry Bishop and Willi Unsoeld transported from Namche Bazar to Shanta Bhavan hospital in Kathmandu by helicopter.

June 9: Rest of Expedition reaches Kathmandu.

Members
American Mount Everest Expedition

Allen (Al) C. Auten: 36, Denver, Colorado; Assistant Editor of Design News; Responsible for Expedition radio communications.

Barry (Barrel) C. Bishop: 31, Washington, D.C.; Photographer, National Geographic Society; Expedition still photographer.

John (Jake) E. Breitenbach: 27, Jackson, Wyoming; Mountain guide and part owner of mountaineering and ski equipment store, Grand Tetons.

James Barry Corbet: z6, Jackson, Wyoming; Mountain guide, ski instructor, and part owner of mountaineering and ski equipment store, Grand Tetons.

David (Dave) L. Dingman, M.D.: z6, Baltimore, Maryland; Resident in surgery; Second medical officer of Expedition.

Daniel (Dan) E. Doody: 29, North Granford, Connecticut; Photographer by profession and for Expedition.

Norman G. Dyhrenfurth: 44, Santa Monica, California; Motion picture photographer and director; Expedition organizer, leader, and film producer.

Richard (Dick) M. Emerson, Ph.D.: 38, Cincinnati, Ohio; Assistant Professor of Sociology, University of Cincinnati; Expedition logistical planner, and head of sociological study on motivation.

Thomas (Tom) F. Hornbein, M.D.: 32, San Diego, California; Physician; Responsible for Expedition oxygen equipment and planning.

Luther (Lute) G. Jerstad: 26, Eugene, Oregon; Speech instructor, University of Oregon, and mountain guide, Mount Rainier.

James (Jim) Lester, Ph.D.: 35, Berkeley, California; Clinical psychologist; Studied pyschological aspects of stress during Expedition.

Maynard M. Miller, Ph.D.: 41, East Lansing, Michigan; Associate Professor of geology (glaciology, etc.), Michigan State University; Research in glaciology and geomorphology of the Everest region.

Richard (Dick) Pownall: 35, Denver, Colorado; High school physical education instructor and ski instructor; Expedition food planner.

Barry (Bear, Balu) W. Prather: 2-3, Ellensburg, Washington; Aeronautics engineer; Assistant to Maynard Miller in geological research.

Gilbert (Gil) Roberts, M.D.: z8, Berkeley, California; Physician; Responsible for medical planning and problems of Expedition.

James (Jimmy) Owen M. Roberts: 45, Kathmandu, Nepal; Lt. Colonel (retired), British Army; Responsible for Expedition transport and porter and Sherpa planning.

William (Will) E. Sri: 44, Richmond, California; Medical physicist; Deputy leader of Expedition in charge of scientific programme and conduction of physiological research on altitude acclimatization.

James (Jim) Ramsey Ullman: 55, Boston, Massachusetts; Writer; Official chronicler of Expedition as author of Americans on Everest.

William (Willi) F. Unsoeld, Ph.D.: 36, Corvallis, Oregon; Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy and Religion, Oregon State University, on leave as deputy Peace Corps representative in Nepal; Climbing leader.

James (Jim) W. Whittaker: 34, Redmond, Washington; Manager of mountaineering equipment store, Seattle, Washington; Responsible for Expedition equipment planning.

Introduction

by William E. Siri

OTHER MOUNTAINS share with Everest a history of adventure, glory, and tragedy, but only Everest is the highest place on earth. More than two-thirds of the earth's atmosphere lies below its summit, and for an unacclimatized man without oxygen, the top of the mountain is more endurable than outer space by only two or three minutes. The primitive, often brutal struggle to reach its top is an irresistible challenge to our built-in need for adventure. But more than this, Everest became, with the first attempt to scale its ridges, a universal symbol of human courage and endurance; an ultimate test of man's body and spirit.

The discovery in 1852 that Peak XV was the highest mountain in the world emerged from a page of routine survey calculations. When a clerk in the Trigonometric Survey of India offices excitedly informed his superior of his discovery, a careful check of his calculations, which were based on observations made three years earlier, confirmed his claim and the summit was set at 29,002 feet. (Careful modern observations have settled on an elevation of 29,028 feet, the value now generally accepted.) Peak XV now rated more distinction than a file number and was given the name Mount Everest after the first Surveyor-General of India, Sir George Everest. There was no way then of knowing that the Tibetans long ago recognized it as the greatest of mountains and called it Chomo-longma, Goddess Mother of the World.

For sixty-nine years following the clerk's exciting discovery little more could be learned about Mount Everest. It stood astride the Nepalese-Tibetan border, remote and inaccessible. Nepal and Tibet were tightly scaled against foreigners and hostile to intruders. From India, Mount Everest was all but hidden from view by lesser but nearer peaks.

Not until 1921, after years of negotiation, was permission coaxed from the Tibetan government and a reconnaissance expedition launched from Darjeeling. The route circled 400 miles over the high, windy Tibetan plateau to reach the north side of Mount Everest at the head of the Rongbuk Glacier. In the course of this first reconnaissance the most famous of early Everest climbers, George Leigh Mallory, found the key to the route on Everest by his discovery of the East Rongbuk Glacier, from which the North Col (23,000 feet) could be

climbed. All succeeding British expeditions before World War II were compelled to make the long, exhausting trek across the Tibetan plateau to the north side of Everest. The first full-scale attempt on Everest was launched by the British the following year. For this early period of highaltitude climbing Geoffrey Bruce and George Finch performed an incredible feat in climbing to more than 27,000 feet before they were turned back by wind and exhaustion. The 1922 expedition ended in failure and tragedy, but the route to the summit of Everest was now clear. Spring of 1924 saw another strong British climbing party struggle to the North Col and force its way up the Northeast ridge of Everest. For the third time Mallory, whose name was to become almost synonymous with that of the mountain that obsessed him, returned to Everest determined that nothing could turn him back. E. F. Norton and T. H. Somervell, however, were to make the first summit attempt and in doing so reached a new record height of more than 28,000 feet, which placed them at the Great Couloir directly below the summit.

Mallory and his young companion, Andrew Irvine, now made their bid for the summit, with N. E. Odell climbing one day behind them in support. From the highest camp at more than 27,000 feet, Odell saw Mallory and Irvine briefly as they ascended a prominent step high on the main East Ridge before the scene was obscured by clouds. At that point they were unaccountably four or five hours behind schedule. The winds that took over Everest that afternoon continued without let-up for days. In a remarkable tour de force, Odell searched the whole route from the North Col to more than 27,000 feet for signs of the missing climbers before he was driven back by the storm.

Speculation on the fate of Mallory and Irvine continues to this day. Did they fall and now lie entombed in the Rongbuk Glacier? Did they perish from cold and exhaustion high on the East Ridge? Or did they reach the summit? It is tempting to think they did and that they still lie frozen in bivouac where they were overtaken by darkness and storm on the descent. It is possible they made the same decision as that made later by Hornbein and Unsoeld to push on to the summit despite the late hour and difficulties. If they did, they were less lucky than the Americans. Perhaps on 49 nights out of 50 the cold winds raging over Everest make such a decision fatal.

A lapse of nine years brought a new generation of British climbers to Everest. Two successive summit teams in 1933 were turned back, like their predecessors, just beyond 28,ooo feet. Only a reconnaissance was possible in 1935 because of frustrating delays in securing permission from Tibet. In 1936 a powerful expedition was defeated by

storms and avalanches before it ever set foot on the mountain. Two years later, two summit attempts by the 1938 British expedition were again frustrated by the seemingly impenetrable barrier at 28,ooo feet. The first chapter of the struggle for Everest's summit was brought to a close by the outbreak of World War II.

After centuries of isolation, Nepal in 1949 opened its border to foreign visitors. Everest was now accessible by a direct, low-level route from India, and the scene of activity shifted to Everest's south side. Light reconnaissance parties pioneered the new trail to Everest in 19So and 1951. They also saw that the only possible route onto the mountain was a narrow, hazardous icefall rising from the Khumbu Glacier to the high valley of ice, the Western Cwm, between Everest and the Lhotse-Nuptse Ridge. Permission for Everest was now on a first-come-first-served basis and the Swiss were ready first. On their first try in the spring of 1952 the Swiss pioneered the whole route via the South Col and they nearly reached the summit. Raymond Lambert and Tenzing Norgay ascended the Southeast Ridge within 8oo feet. In the fall they returned for another attempt but were forced by intense cold, high winds, and short days to retreat before reaching the former high point. It was as a member of this Expedition that Norman Dyhrenfurth became hopelessly addicted to Everest. Eleven years later he would organize and lead the American expedition. The following spring, 1953, the British were ready. R. C. Evans and T. D. Bourdillon made the first attempt, and might have succeeded but for the failure of their intricate, closed-circuit oxygen apparatus. They reached the South Summit, only 300 feet below the main summit, and no great climbing difficulties lay ahead. Using the more reliable though less efficient open-circuit apparatus, the next team set out from the South Col. On May 29, 1953, Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay reached the summit. Everest had at last been climbed.

If it lost any of the lustre it had as an unclimbed peak, Everest still remained the most alluring of goals for climbers. It was, after all, still the highest mountain in the world. Dyhrenfurth returned to the mountain in the fall of 1955 with a strong but small team, too small in resources to tackle Everest; so they turned their attention to Lhotsc. Once again, as in the fall of 1952, the merciless autumn winds and cold made high altitudes untenable. When the Swiss returned in 1956, it was to make a clean sweep of Everest. In near perfect weather four men reached the summit: Ernst Schmied and Jiirg Marmet on one day; Hans-Rudolf von Gunten and Adolf Reist the next. As if Everest were not enough, two members of the expedition also made the first ascent of Lhotse (27,890 feet).

Two large, well-equipped Indian expeditions were to challenge Everest before the Americans arrived on the scene. Both expeditions were brutally mauled by almost continuous storms and high-velocity winds. Despite this, the first Indian expedition in 1960, with Nawang Gombu leading the summit team, forced its way to 28,300 feet. The second expedition in 1962 pushed on to 28,600 feet before it too was blown from the mountain. There was activity on the north side of Everest as well. The Chinese in 1960 launched a full-scale assault from the Rongbuk Glacier via the North Col route of the early British expeditions. The claim that two Chinese climbers, Wang Fu Chou and Chu Yin Hua, together with Kobu, a Tibetan, reached the summit has been questioned. The climbers said they arrived at the summit at 1:50 in the morning of May 25, 1960, the same day the Indian summit team on the south side was turned back by fierce winds. Other attempts of sorts have been made on the north side. Maurice Wilson, an Englishman driven by fanatical faith in a divine vision, tried it alone in 1934 and died at the foot of the ice cliffs of the North Col. An American, Woodrow Wilson Sayre, and three companions, none of whom were experienced climbers, crossed secretly into Tibet from Nepal in 1962 to make an unauthorized attempt on Everest from the north. An intense personal drive combined with a sequence of incredibly lucky circumstances that all but surpasses belief permitted Sayre to reach 25,000 feet and live to tell about it. Everest is sometimes merciful as well as cruel.

By the time the Americans arrived, Everest had been climbed by six men, possibly nine, conceivably eleven. The routes on two of its three ridges were well established. The third, the West Ridge, had been given only passing notice by earlier expeditions and dismissed as hopeless. No one knew if Americans were yet ready to climb Everest by any route, but we were determined that they would not fail, as we had on Makalu, for want of equipment, funds, and even food. The Expedition consequently was large by American mountaineering standards, but so were its aims. The addition of Lhotse and Nuptse to the original list of goals meant a large climbing team. Moreover, the Expedition was conceived and organized from the outset as a joint mountaineeringscientific venture and this added still more to the manpower, impedimenta, and cost. The aims were also made more difficult, if not expanded, by the abandonment of Lhotse and Nuptse for the unexplored West Ridge of Everest. During three hectic years of preparation, the expedition grew constantly in size and ambitions. By the time Dyhrenfurth brought his creation to the foot of Everest, there were nineteen American members, a British transport officer, a Nepalese liaison officer, some 47 Sherpas, more than nine hundred

porters bearing twenty-seven tons of material, and six separate scientific programmes.

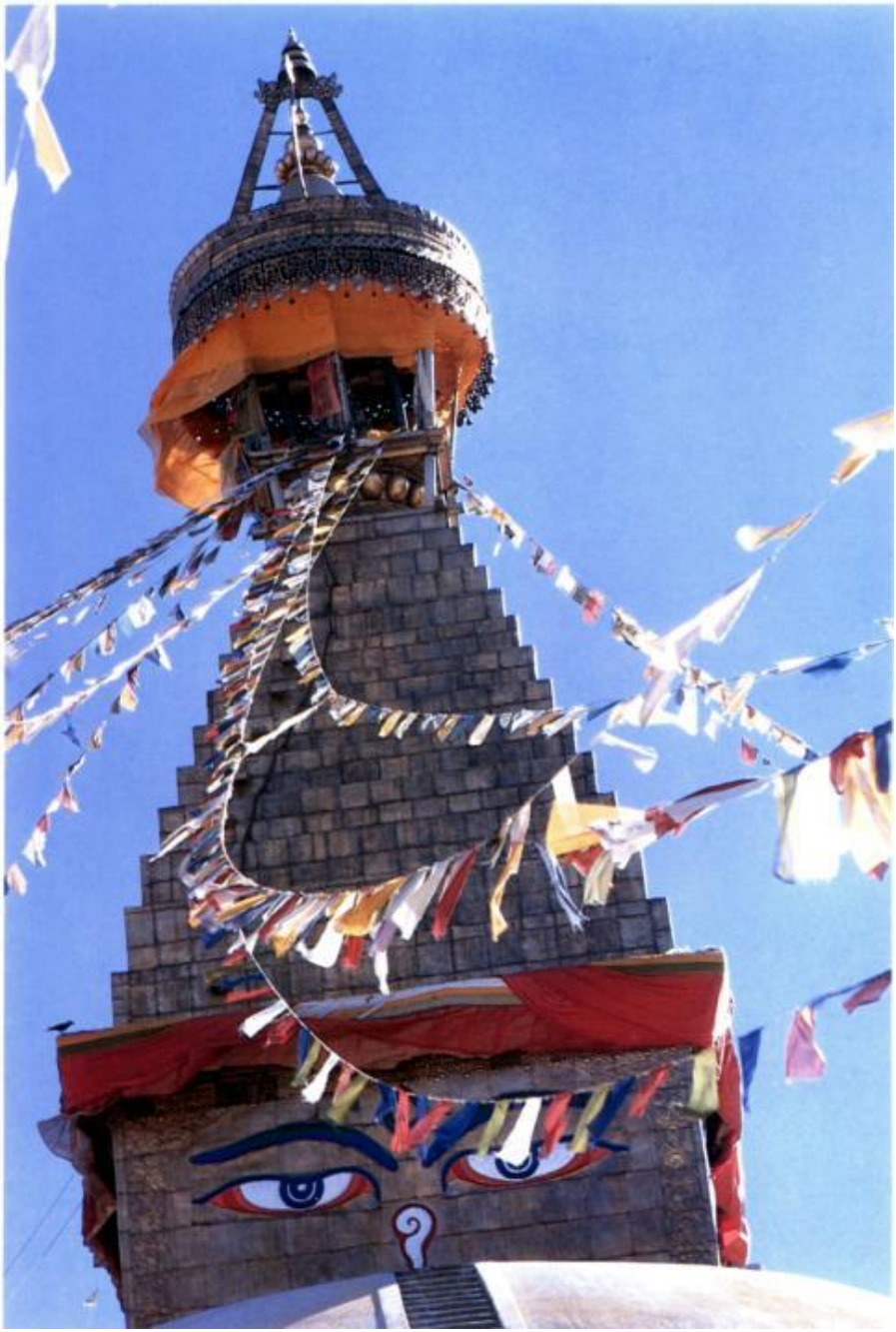
American expeditions had been shoestring affairs in the past and doubtless will continue to be so in the future. The Everest Expedition was different for no other reason than the determination and genius of Norman Dyhrenfurth. He brought his dream of a powerful, well-equipped American expedition to reality. During the three-year struggle, I often marvelled at his total dedication to the task, and even more at his eloquent persuasiveness-and astonishing success-in seeking support for the venture. Supporting his natural talent for planning and organizing the expedition was an intimate knowledge of the Himalaya possessed by few men and no other American. In the end, the expedition's achievements matched its ambitions. James Whittaker and Nawang Gombu, and later Luther Jerstad and Barry Bishop, reached the summit by the South Col route; Tom Hornbein and Willi Unsoeld successfully pioneered a new and difficult route on the West Ridge; and the scientific programmes brought back new insight into the nature of high-altitude glaciers and a wealth of information on man's physiological machinery, his mental processes, and group behaviour.

The seed of the idea of challenging Everest by way of the West Ridge was planted by Dyhrenfurth early in the Expedition's formative stage. It lay dormant until we were well on the road to the mountain, marching over the foothills of the Himalaya, before it grew into an unwavering dedication in the minds of Tom Hornbein, Willi Unsoeld, and their old climbing companions, Corbet, Emerson, and Breitenbach. Pioneering a new route on Everest excited everyone's imagination, for a high reconnaissance of the Ridge would be a gratifying mountaineering achievement even though it fell short of the summit. But there is a vast gulf between success and the best of tries short of it. The Expedition would be a failure in nearly every sense if the whole of its effort had been expended in a courageous but unsuccessful attempt via the Ridge. The moral and contractual commitments we had accepted to make the Expedition possible made the decision clear. Until the summit was reached by the South Col-the surer way-no large-scale diversions, however attractive, should jeopardize this effort. The larger part of the team was no less dedicated to climbing Everest by the South Col than were others to exploring the West Ridge.

There was no doubt in our minds that following the ascent of Everest, the resources of the Expedition would be diverted to the West Ridge. The opportunity could not be passed over, for the Expedition

possessed a rare asset: strong, skilful climbers who were totally dedicated to the task. Nevertheless, the patience of the West Ridgers would be tried in the weeks before May i, when Whittaker and Gombu hoisted themselves and their flagpole onto the summit of Everest.

Inevitably the Expedition's large size evoked the ancient but still favourite subject for debate among mountaineers: the merits of small versus large expeditions. The subject is heavily crusted with subjective values and consequently conducive to strong convictions, vigorous debate, and, of course, is impossible to spoil with definite conclusions. Climbers tend to be rugged individualists. To them climbing is not a sport in the true sense, least of all an organized sport. Rather, it is a deep personal experience enjoyed in its fullest only when shared with a few close companions. Large expeditions bring with them some of the trappings and restraints of organized society that the climber would just as soon leave behind.



THOMAS HORNBEIN: Temple and prayer flags, Bodnath

JAMES LESTER: Drummer, Kathmandu

Of all resources, the most crucial is Man's spirit.

> Not dulled, nor lulled, supine, secure, replete does Man create,
> But out of stern challenge ...

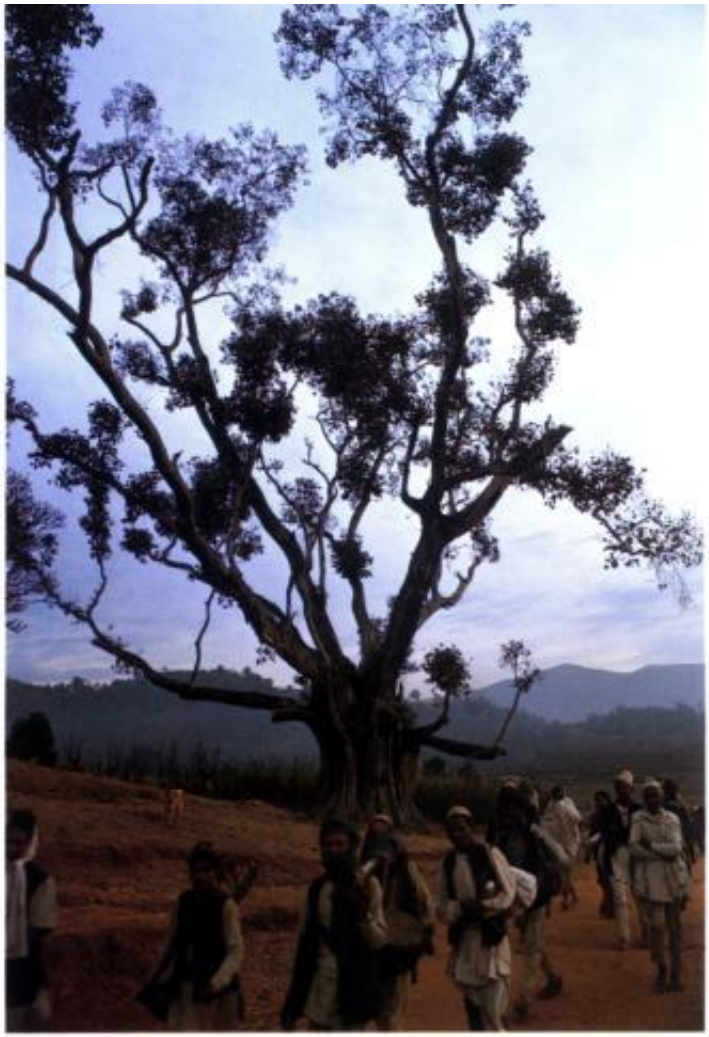
From what immortal hungers, what sudden sight of the unknown, surges that desire? What flint of fact, what kindling light of art or far horizon, ignites that spark? What cry, what music, what strange beauty, strikes that romance:

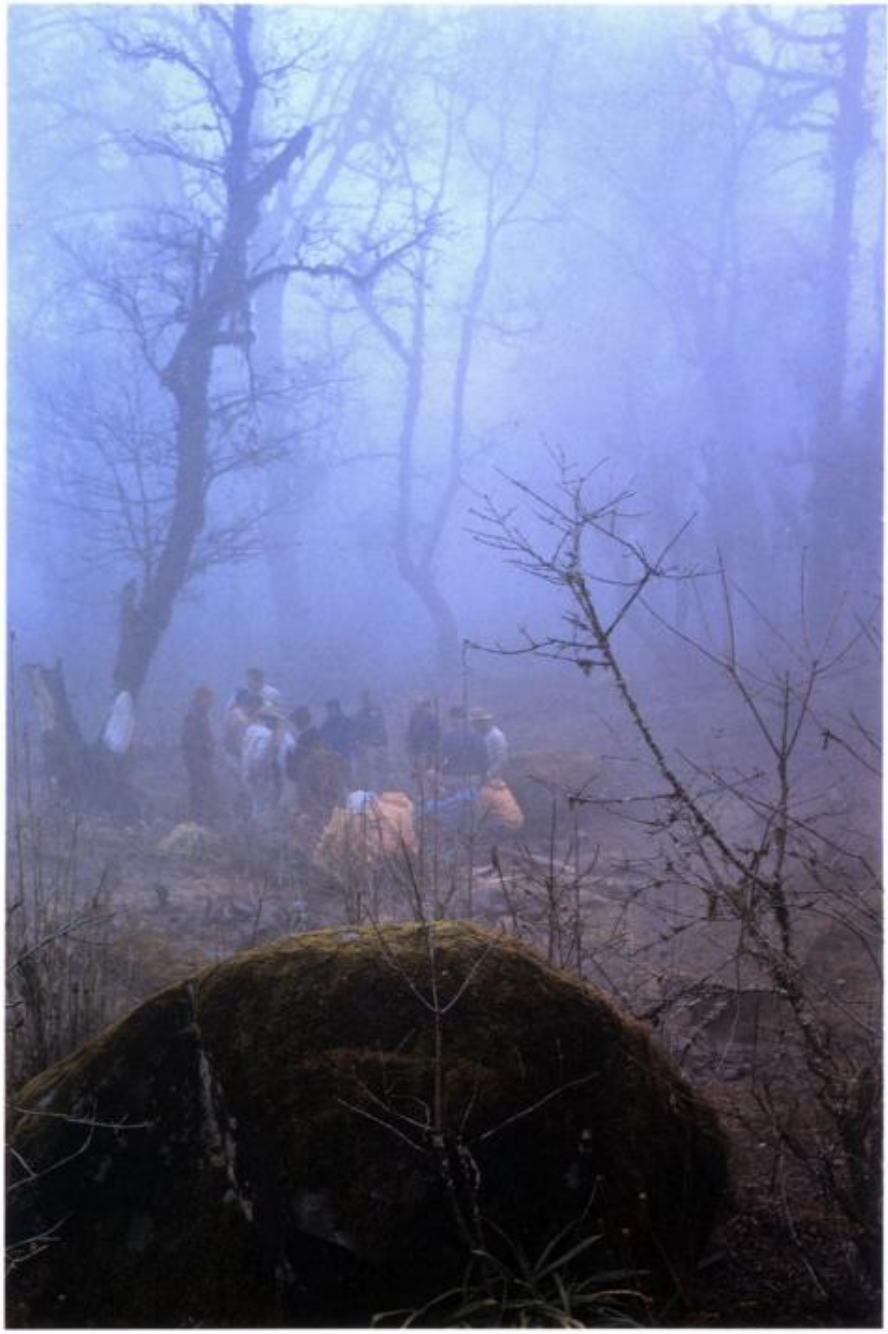
On these hangs the future of the world.

NANCY NEWHALL

THOMAS HORNBEIN: Sherpani porters resting

THOMAS HORNBEIN: Tilling





JAMES LESTER: Camp at Pusan

RICHARD EMERSON: Pipul tree Approach march

RICHARD EMERSON: Mini rocks

... On each day's march we were to find the day made memorable either by some little incident, almost always trivial, or by a sight so briefly seen that we could not have imagined that any indelible record would be left on the memory. But so it was. We moved daily through scenes of the most spendid beauty; daily, on every hand and wherever we might turn, there it was manifested, so that we became familiar with beauty and took its presence very much for granted, and ceased consciously to respond: until that daily, fleeting glimpse into the heart of beauty's very self came suddenly upon the inner eye - flashed upon the soul-and was gone. The duration of vision is of no consequence...

I tried to let their beauty soak in, and when I did so a new beauty, something additional to all I had yet seen, seemed to shine out of them; out of the grass an added richness of green, out of the pines more fragrance of resin, from the blossom of the rhododendrons a glow of colour still brighter; unfathomable deeps and gentleness bloomed in the sky's blue. This newness taken on by the world was like that of something freshly created .. .

-W.H. MURRAY

THOMAS HORNBEIN: Emerson and the Dudh Kosi

THOMAS HORNBEIN: Crossing the Dudh Kosi

JAMES LESTER: Porter waiting out rain

... That anyone should want to climb a high mountain solely for pleasure, is, at the present time, simply not understood by these mountain peasants.

The exceptions are a few Sherpas who have developed a feeling for the beauty of the mountains and have discovered the pleasure of conquering peaks, owing to repeated participation in expeditions. This is especially true in the case of my own Sherpa, Aila, who was my

companion for seven years. Often when we were sitting on a summit with a magnificent panorama spread out before us, he would say very dryly, "Very much country, sir." This was his way of expressing his pleasure at the wonderful view. Latterly he went so far as to say, "Very beautiful country, sir." There was a wealth of enthusiasm behind these terse remarks.

-TONI HAGEN

Nevertheless, the large expeditions have, for the most part, offered the only opportunity to challenge the greatest Himalayan peaks with any reasonable expectation of success. No serious climber could resist the call to join such an expedition no matter how strong his feelings about its size and multiplicity of non-mountaineering commitments. If his convictions are strong, he cannot help feeling at times a conflict between his obligations to the leader and the highly personal satisfactions and freedoms he seeks in mountaineering.

The ascent of the West Ridge and with it the traverse of Everest constitute one of the most astonishing feats in Himalayan mountaineering history. The meeting near the summit of two successful teams from opposite sides of the mountain, and their survival of a bivouac at 28,ooo feet without oxygen, shelter, or food, added both intentional and unintentional embellishments to an already unique feat. Tom Hornbein has given us a stirring account of this great episode in Himalayan climbing. Everest can be an overwhelming experience that is more complex and deeply felt than simply the exposure for several months to discomfort, exhausting effort, uncertainty, and awesome scenery. The ascent of the West Ridge as seen through the eyes and mind of Hornbein brings clearly into focus the human as well as the physical struggle that is a part of climbing a great peak. In his intensely personal story, Hornbein shows a subtle insight into the feelings and impressions, the hopes and frustations of those who would climb Everest. Each responds differently to the experience ; but the country, the mountain, and the intense struggle leave deep, lasting marks-some that are scars hard to live with, and some that a man would never wish to lose.

1. Beginnings

It was hot. Yellow dust rose from beneath our feet, settling opaquely on sunglasses and thickening the sweat on our faces. The warmth of the valley floor at Panchkal was hard to reconcile with February and the ice-sheathed summits thirty miles to the north. The path climbed gently, past openfronted bazaars and teashops, near the porch of a mud brick house where a woman squatted pounding a large round rock into a mortar filled with rice ; beyond, it led through the shade of a corridor of trees, out into the sun again, then up alongside the dry earth of terraced fields awaiting the monsoon. Exertion purged our excesses of soft living and overeating, the first step in the hardening necessary for the weeks ahead, a need my feet were painfully aware of on this second day of our march toward Everest.

Willi Unsoeld and I were far behind the procession, having lingered to say goodbye to Jim Ullman. Panchkal, one day out of Kathmandu, was the end of Jim's journey toward the mountain; the doctors, I among them, had so decreed. The risk to his health, his life, and thus to the prospects of the Expedition was too great. Turning back hadn't been easy-his dream must now walk on without himand as he wished us a good journey his smile quivered at the edges. There wasn't much to be said, but Willi tried. I stood by awkwardly, impatient to be moving on, not wanting to prolong this farewell. I felt guilty that I was appreciating too little the opportunity to go on toward Everest, an opportunity for which Jim would gladly have sacrificed either leg.

We walked on side by side, following the myriad prints of bare feet in the dust. It was nearly three years since we had known such simple isolation. There was much to be said, once we overcame that feeling if strangeness, wondering how much the other had changed.

`You know, Willi, I'm not very excited about this whole affair. I'm not sure why I came along.'

`Me either,' he said, `but I've been too swamped to think about it. That's one of the big things I'm looking forward to -just the chance to do some thinking.'

`Sometimes I wonder what I hope to get from this trip. For one thing, as far as my own needs go, I don't see how it can touch Masherbrum. This affair is just too big, and people are more diverse. And too much publicity. Still, you don't turn down Everest because of that. But if you and Emerson hadn't come, I don't think I would have

considered it.'

`Guess that's what swung it for me too.'

I reminded him of my wife's reaction. Gene had known I would be going back even before I got home from Masherbrum. When she read that I wasn't one of the ones who reached the summit she knew that I still had a question to answer about myself. Apparently she was right, but there was far more to the question than just reaching the top of a mountain. Otherwise why was Willi here? With George Bell, he had made the top of Masherbrum. He had passed the Himalayan test-or had he?

`Not really,' he said. `After all, Everest is the ultimate testin altitude, anyway.'

`Well, the way I figure it,' I said, `it ought to be a lot easier than Masherbrum, at least by the Col. For one thing there's not nearly the danger we had before, especially from avalanche.'

`True, but we're going to hit a lot more wind and cold, and we'll be high a lot longer.'

`Sure, but we'll be using oxygen. Physiologically, Everest with oxygen should be easier than Masherbrum without. At least, that's what I keep telling myself.'

The trail levelled out at the crest of a hill, and aimed at a saddle in the ridge ahead. We started down, leaving the valley of Panchkal behind. A small stream joined us, tumbling temptingly beside the trail in a series of clear pools joined by miniature waterfalls. The melody was too sweet to resist, and we stopped. I sat on the grass, leaning luxuriously against a tree as the chill water anaesthetized the raw spots on my heels. Willi poked with a needle from his hat band at a blister engulfing his little toe.

`One thing that bothers me,' he said, `is that I've been working so darned hard lately I'm just about run down. I'm exhausted when I climb into bed at night. Maybe the old guide's too far along for this sort of thing.'

`Cut it out, old man,' I said. `All I hope is you're washed up enough that I can keep up with you.'

After a while we pulled on our socks and boots, rose reluctantly, and started up the trail.

Willi resumed, `I guess I'm hunting for some answers too. Where do I go after the Peace Corps? Philosophy, foreign service, or what? That's the big thing I hope this trip will clarify.'

`That's asking a lot, Willi-a programme for your whole future. But at least you've got some idea of what you're after. I wish I had such a bonafide excuse for being here.' I fell silent. Supposedly, my future was all plotted out, at least for the next few years. But something was bugging me. Why was I here? I seemed to be hunting for answers to questions I couldn't even ask. What difference could Everest make even if I got to the top? What was up there to make me any wiser? Nothing but rocks and snow and sky.

There was a time, though, when doubts didn't exist, when the why was unnecessary. Everest was unclimbed. Could it be? Could a man survive at 29,000 feet? That question was a part of me when, at fourteen, I climbed my first mountain in northern Colorado. It was a long gentle walk, rising through a grove of quivering aspen blanketing the crest of an old moraine. I saw the wind-flattened trees at timberline and finally climbed breathlessly over gentle tundra to the summit of Signal Mountain, and tasted the effort of the climb, the soaring freedom waiting at the top. It was a beginning.

Far from the mountains in the winter, I discovered the blurred photo of Everest in Richard Halliburton's Book of Marvels. It was a miserable reproduction in which the jagged peaks rose white against a grotesquely blackened and scratched sky. Everest itself, sitting back from the front ones, didn't even appear the highest, but it didn't matter. It was; the legend said so. Dreams were the key to the picture, permitting a boy to enter it, to stand acrest the high windswept ridge, to climb toward the summit, now no longer far above. My fantasy revealed itself a bit in `Ambition,' a theme I wrote in 1946: `I greatly long to someday climb ['Another split,' exclaimed Margo Johnson, my English teacher] in the Himalayas. I dream of the day when I shall first gaze upon such peaks as Everest, the mysterious Amne Machen, K-2, Kangchenjunga, Nanga Parbat, which has taken so many lives, Nanda Devi, the not quite so high but equally entrancing Mustagh Tower.'

This was one of those uninhibited dreams that come free with growing up. I was sure that mine about Everest was not mine alone; the highest point on earth, unattainable, foreign to all experience, was there for many boys and grown men to aspire toward. Even as my love of the mountains grew, and the skill for travelling on them, my dream was buried beneath vocation, marriage, children-a raft of real

responsibilities, so full of all the challenge and pleasure a man should ask for, that Everest no longer seemed so important.

Anyway it didn't wait. On May 29, 1953, Tenzing and Hillary reached the summit of Everest. Admiration of their achievement mingled with sadness that the struggle was ended, a struggle that now seemed greater in the playing than in the winning. So men could climb it. Had there really ever been any doubt? Did it make man greater or the mountain less? Whatever the answer, the unknown was no longer unknown; a bit more of the dream died.

In the summer of 196o Nick Clinch invited me to come along to be the climbing doctor for the American-Pakistan Karakoram Expedition to Masherbrum, a beautiful mountain standing icily alone and aloof 25,660 feet high, at the head of the Hushe Valley. The peak had been tried three times before and proved to be properly seasoned with difficulty and danger. We climbed it, and that I failed to reach the summit seemed hardly to matter for I had worked hard; our success was mine, and the depth of companionship would be hard to equal. I had tasted the best there was. The dream of Everest became even less important.

But in May 1961, a postcard came to my home in St. Louis from Norman Dyhrenfurth, saying: `Perhaps you have read that Nepal gave me permission for Everest-Lhotse-Nuptse in t963? During discussions your name was brought up. If the project interests you, how about mailing me a snapshot, a brief biography and a climbing record? Do let me hear from you.'

Everest. The old distant longings stirred. It might be fun, I thought, especially if George Bell and Dick Emerson and Willi Unsoeld were to go. I didn't need to go, for Masherbrum had quenched my thirst. But a chance to see the highest point on earth? I doubted that the money could ever be raised. But I might as well say I was interested and see what developed.

On May 13 I replied: `Yes, the project "interests" me considerably. It is too soon to be sure of availability, though I would guess the chances are excellent.

`Incidentally, I have been fiddling with one of the Swiss oxygen masks in the lab and believe it can be improved to perform much more efficiently. If you're interested, I shall be happy to give you details when the tests are completed.'

This brought an airmail letter in response: `Your letter of May 13, was welcome news, indeed. We have decided on a total of fifteen men, fourteen of whom are able to go "high".

`As to the question of oxygen, I agree that the equipment could stand some improvements. If it is O.K. with you, I would like to put you in charge of oxygen equipment from here on in.'

During the next eighteen months the Expedition ripened to solvent reality under Norman's imaginative guidance. On February 3, 1963, we were on our way. I sat, seat belt fastened, heavy with an emptiness, and began a letter to my wife, who stood a hundred yards away inside the terminal.

My pen paused as loneliness and doubt overwhelmed. I wanted to get off the plane and walk those hundred yards and forget this nonsense. But I couldn't-and live with myself. As suddenly as it had welled up, the feeling subsided, but the pain lingered, perhaps to intensify by contrast the pleasure I knew would come. Parting from Gene, I felt the bond of years tug stronger than it ever had before; paradoxically, the feeling diminished loneliness.

A restless urge to come to grips with the mountain, and myself, pulled me on. After three years of civilized living I needed proof of my ability to tolerate such an environment once again, and I needed time for introspection to try to understand an urge that mixed so much sadness with expectancy. I felt strangely assured that I would get to the top. This arose from something intangible, beyond just prior knowledge of what Everest was like. But looked at objectively, clearly, my confidence was irrational. Weather could affect the success of the entire undertaking; my own health and performance at 32 might turn out poor compared to what it was in 1960; I might not be in the right place at the right time; and there were eighteen others, of impressive stature physically and presumably of equal motivation. All these reasons made my hopes unrealistic, but the dream was fully alive now and it wouldn't let go.

a. Gestation

The second night we camped at Dolalghat, on the point of land separating the Sun Kosi and Indrawati Kosi. The confluence of these two large rivers marked the low point in our journey, not quite two thousand feet above sea level. Dick, Willi, and I spent the afternoon at the river, washing a few clothes, watching two giggling Sherpanis who flirtingly bathed just above us, then wandered off downstream. After a few gasps when we took the first cold plunge, we found the water pleasantly tolerable. We played like boys suddenly freed from school for the summer, inventing games, seeking challenges. Wading into the current we crossed the painfully rocky bottom to the other side, hobbled upstream, and floated back across to our landing. Then, discovering a wonderful selection of flat, smooth stones, we began skipping them along the surface of the water, seeing how much mileage we could put into each spinning disc. Willi finally sent one skittering out on to the opposite river bank, providing a new challenge for Dick and me. I succeeded once in delivering a stone to the other side; Willi and Dick, possessing more skill, power, and wrist dexterity, soon attained enviable regularity.

A lean, young porter stopped on the opposite shore to watch, fascinated. He tried to throw the stones back, at first awkwardly, as he attempted to mimic Unsoeld's style, but soon he was accurately skipping them on to our beach. Once he and Willi managed to exchange the same stone twice without wetting its upper side. After a time he waved thanks for the new-found game and wandered downstream.

As in this game, communication between Sahib and Sherpa was largely unspoken; few of our Sherpas knew much English and we were even worse off. Jimmy Roberts, or Noddy, or even Gombu could bridge the gap for us when they were around, and old Tashi, who had been with Tilman on Everest in 1938, had an impressive vocabulary. If there was reason behind Tashi's choice of words, there wasn't any in the order of their arrangement. They came forth scrambled, challenging the listener to sort them out and reassemble them in a sensible sequence. Whether we understood Tashi is something we were never quite sure of. In spite of this linguistic limitation, or because of it, communication with our Sherpas at a deeper level never was a problem.

The people living in the Sola Khumbu, the high hills around the

base of Everest, were, like the hills themselves, unencumbered by civilization and were full of fun. Some, infected with Western man's ailments, were opportunists, like our sirdar, Passang Phutar. A few were lazy, though rarely so skillfully as the doctor's dapper helper, Angayle. Most of them were willing to work hard, in part because that was what they were paid for, and in part out of respect for the men with whom they climbed. They were shrewd judges of character, and they sought it inside the man.

As for me, the novelty never quite wore off of coming into camp each afternoon to find a smiling Tenzing Nindra waiting to remove my pack. As I settled luxuriously into a chair, he returned with camp shoes to replace the blister pounders I had been wearing during the day. Sitting relaxed in the warm afternoon, a can of beer in one hand, I remembered the San Francisco Chronicle headline on our day of departure about `The New Soft Life on Mt. Everest'. When I headed for the sack at night, there was my whole bed laid out, blown up, fluffed, with pyjamas laid neatly on top. Our first reaction back in the States was that this might be all right for the British or Swiss, but independent American types could never tolerate being waited upon. Now, all I wondered was whether I'd remember how to blow up my air mattress at twenty-six thousand feet when Tenzing wasn't available. This ritual was an ingrained part of the relationship, easier to accept than to change, or so we rationalized. I suspect it was not a chore for our Sherpas and there was no hint of servitude. I wondered whether their solicitousness was not designed to spare their frail Sahibs' limited energy for the effort ahead.

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From Dolalghat, we climbed steeply to make camp on the open slopes of the ridge at Chaubas, five thousand feet higher. It was a hot day and the occasional shade of banyan trees planted for rest stops came as a thankful oasis. At camp that evening we gathered in the large tent to discuss our mountaineering goal-climbing of the three peaks enclosing the Western Cwm. All had been climbed before: Everest in 1953, and again in 1956; Lhotse, by the 1956 Swiss expedition; and Nuptse, from the other side by the British in 1961. It remained for us to climb all three, to achieve a grand slam unique in the history of Himalayan mountaineering. Since Norman had capitalized on this in his tireless search for funds, we had an obligation to it. But who among us would rather climb Lhotse than Everest? Or the long, many-summited ridge of Nuptse? Somehow, to a group of mountaineers, the prospect of these re-ascents lacked

challenge. There was a way out: a new route on Everest.

I had first heard about it when Norman came to visit in San Diego. Photos were unfurled and laid end to end across our living-room floor to make a vast panorama-held in place by children's blocks. While I looked at our triple goal, Norm asked, with a matter-of-factness that seemed irreverent to the highest mountain on earth, `What do you think of trying the West Ridge? Maybe it wouldn't be so bad if we went up from the South Col and then descended to a camp at 25,000 feet'. The idea of a new route sounded wild to me. Wasn't it enough to climb by the regular way?

But Norm had planted the idea and a boyhood dream was alive again: Everest, and by a new route. I kept the dream vivid with a copy of the 1954 Mountain World that lay for weeks upon my desk, open to an Indian Air Force photo of Everest from the west. With greater and greater ease, I escaped in the course of those weeks to the black snowetched rock of the West Ridge. That slope looks O.K. if we can get out of the Cwm to it-maybe across those slabs, and up that thin gully of snow. I wonder if it goes clear through those cliffs at 28,ooo. If only I could see into that gully. Looks steep though. Can't tell from the picture. Still, it might be a way. But don't be ridiculous, Tom. That's Everest you're looking at.

At our shake-down cruise on Mount Rainier in the fall of 1962 Norm said: `Let's not let our thoughts leak out to the press. We can talk more about the West Ridge when we're on the way.' But many of us couldn't wait.

`What do you think of Norm's idea the other night of descending the West Ridge?' Barry Corbet asked.

`Sounds great if he wants to do it,' I replied. `But no thanks; I'm too chicken. Can you imagine yourself dragging over the summit of Everest from the Col side, running on the dregs of your oxygen, and then plunging down an unknown route? With a camp waiting four thousand feet below? Hell, if you get into trouble three hundred feet down, you've had it. You could never get back up over the top.'

Barry asked, `Then why not move the camp up closer to the top?'

`Sure,' Dick Emerson agreed. `In that case you might as well go up the ridge. It'd be just as easy, and a heck of a lot safer.'

`Well, Norm was trying to do it without ploughing too much effort into that side,' I said, remembering that he felt it would take less

equipment to go down it than to go up.

`Still, it sounds like suicide to me,' Dick said.

`Maybe we can make a double traverse,' Jake Breitenbach suggested. `One team up each side, trade a man at the top, and then descend both routes.'

`How are you going to decide which pair goes down which way?'

`They can fight it out.'

Barry Bishop was struck by the casualness with which we toyed with the idea.

`Delusions of grandeur,' he had said.

Now, at Chaubas, was a good time to look at the delusions as a group. What about the West Ridge? Its appeal was tremendous, but how could it fit into our plan for the Grand Slam?

`The West Ridge will be a hell of a lot more impressive if we can pull it off,' Dan Doody said.

`But if we don't pull it off, we might end up with nothing,' Norm replied.

`To the mountaineering world, even a good attempt would be a significant achievement,' Dick Emerson said.

But there were many other things to weigh, not all of them mountaineering considerations. Norm pointed out, `This may sound like Madison Avenue kind of talk, but you know how long it took to raise our money and, I repeat, the Swiss have done Everest and Lhotse. If we do less than that as an expedition, to the world, not to mountaineers, we are less successful.'

Bishop thought that the photographic possibilities on the West Ridge would be spectacular. It was his opinion that the National Geographic Society would be enthusiastic about a West Ridge attempt, and after all, they were our largest single contributor.

Since we were discussing all the possibilities, we might as well be

thorough, I thought. Besides, a good trader always asks more than he expects to get. I suggested `Why not just dump the Col Route and put the entire expedition on the West Ridge? This would give us the best possible chance of climbing it.'

There was a brief silence as the import of my suggestion sank in, then vigorous rebuttal, underlain, I suspected, with unspoken doubt about Hornbein's judgment, if not his sanity. This single remark was to have a lasting effect, typing me as an outspoken advocate of the West Ridge route.

Norman set forth his own reactions in his diary: `... we talked very frankly about the thing that had been on the minds of all the climbers: the West Ridge. If we can pull it off it would be the biggest possible thing still to be accomplished in Himalayan mountaineering. It was interesting to see how highly motivated the whole group was. There was comparatively little interest in Lhotse and Nuptse, although I had explained to them that initially, when we were trying to raise funds, the idea of an American "Grand Slam" of the three peaks had its appeal. But to most of the men that meant very little. In fact, Tom Hornbein, who is such an idealist and so enthusiastic about the West Ridge, declared himself in favour of throwing everything into that attempt, even if it meant jeopardizing success altogether. At this point I had to speak up strongly. I'm all for making a serious stab at the West Ridge-a thorough reconnaissance to see if it's feasible-and then pushing a line of camps up it, but at the same time establishing camps along the old route. Then possibly we can have the main attempt by the West Ridge, but still be sure, as a back up, to have a four-man attempt, with support, from the South Col. Only this way can we be certain of success-or at least as certain as one can be on a mountain like Everest. Everyone agreed with that point of view. We have-almost have-to have a success. If later on we say, "We tried the more difficult route of the West Ridge and bogged down," that will be a very lame excuse for all the people who backed us. So we will try both.'

Our discussion at Chaubas fixed the Ridge firmly in many minds. The days passed by in rapid succession, each vanishing into the vat of yesterdays. Past events took on a fuzzy reality. Letting my diary lapse for one evening, the next night I was faced with the problem: `It is startling how hazy yesterday's march has become. As a matter of fact, it is-ah yes, here it comes. At 6:3o after tea I started out with the front runnersDick Pownall, Lute Jerstad, Bishop, and Breitenbach- enjoying the view as we traversed the ridge. We breakfasted a little after nine, then we dropped through beautiful pine forests, a long way down. Seduced by the crystalline clarity of a flowing stream, we picked a

particularly delectable pool, stripped, soaped, and then dove. Was it ice! But tingling, invigorating, and so lasting that I scarcely sweated the last hour of the uphill journey.'

Heat and dust, and the realization that soon all the water we saw would be in the form of snow and ice, convertible to liquid only by patient melting over a butane stove, caused us to cherish these interludes. Sometimes Willi and I, far back from the rest, would wander from the path to find a particularly delightful pool. Other times, most of the team would join the game, some shedding shirts to air and sun themselves while others stripped for the icy plunge. The temperature of the water offered a Spartan challenge; the first touch of a toe convinced you you didn't need a bath at all and anyway, evaporation of a sweat-soaked T-shirt was cooling enough. But the sun was warm and the pool was inviting, so you soap all over to insure against faintness of heart. Now committed, you take the plunge and gasp until your skin is numb.

There were many such baths, and soon we became spoiled when a day went by without one. One day, Dave Dingman, Willi, Jake, and I enjoyed the added pleasure of running the rapids. The water, not too cold for a change, coursed down narrow channels through a series of large bathrubs, finally emptying into a calm pool edged by a sandy beach. Diving from a boulder fifty yards upstream, we were carried down by the current. Flowing with the water, we alternately bent and arched to avoid scraping our undercarriage on the rocks beneath but still ended up with slightly sandpapered chest and thighs as the price of our wild refreshing ride. Most people preferred it as a spectator sport.

The one evil of these interludes was that it took fortitude to dress and move on again, slipping into rucksacks that were now putting callouses on the grooves carved in our shoulders. By jamming my black umbrella into the ski slot of my pack, I could hike in the shade, occasionally even catching the hint of a breeze.

Once there were tangerines, five for half a Nepalese rupee, deliciously sweet but tantalizingly scarce. Mostly, we put in hours of conversation, while strolling downhill, or sitting under banyan trees watching the line of porters and children passing. Sometimes, we pumped Dick for clues to his sociological study and the purpose of the diaries we filled in each evening. His replies were put in the frustrating language of his profession, designed not only to be truthful but also to be completely unenlightening. Invariably, we returned to the West Ridge, planning, weighing, examining our own and each

other's goals.

The question, as Dave put it one night, was who would be willing to pour his energy into the West Ridge, with failure as a not unlikely outcome, when reaching the summit by the South Col seemed so much more assured.

`I can see a situation,' he said, `where you might be forerunners on the West Ridge and only get to 24,000 while other people are going back and forth to the summit on the other route.'

`I'm not sure I like the alternative you pose, Dave,' Dick said. `I'd like to go to the summit via the West Ridge.'

`I don't think anyone wants to try the West Ridge route and work on it,' Barry Corbet added, `unless there is some possibility of getting to the summit.'

I agreed with Barry, but that word `some' was troublesome. How much gamble was a person willing to take? How much of a shoestring would he be willing to go on? Dick, Willi, and I had devoted a good portion of one day's stroll to trying to handle this question. Dick had suggested that even an attenuated reconnaissance of the West Ridge might be worth the effort if there were hope of `lucking out' and reaching the summit. To me, the less we depended on luck, the better. In the end all three of us agreed that as long as there was any chance of success we'd stay with the West Ridge.

`The reason I asked the question,' Dave continued, `was that the guys that go up and beat away at the West Ridge aren't going to be in any shape to climb anything else. They aren't going to go up and work for three weeks on the West Ridge and then come down and go up the Col.'

Dick agreed: `If you go to work on the West Ridge, you realize that that's your part of the expedition.'

Dan Doody felt we were all wasting our time talking, since Dave's question really couldn't be answered until a reconnaissance had been made.

Before we had even come within sight of the mountain, most of us had done battle with Dave's question and reached at least a tentative decision. Some preferred to sink their efforts into the Col route; some were confirmed West Ridgers, verging on the obnoxious in their enthusiasm; and a few maintained a Col-leaning neutrality, dictated

by scientific obligations or a genuine desire to go where most needed.

On the surface, the choice seemed to be based on climbing interests and skills: rock scramblers on the West Ridge, iceclimbers on the Col route. Underneath lurked far more important intangibles; similarities or fine differences in philoso phies, moral values, social interests. Curiously, with the exception of Willi, not one of the Ridgers had ever engaged in competitive sports; most of the South Colers had. What really lay at the root of each man's answer to Dave's question was another question, one for our psychologist, Jim Lester, to try to answer. But he never answered questions; he only asked them.

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For those who didn't dally, our daily treks ended early in the afternoon, but rarely before the heat and aching feet forced us to ask each passing Sherpa, `How much farther to camp?' The reply, we soon were to discover, was invariable: `Only two mile more, Sah'b.' Still, we never ceased asking and only rarely were we disappointed with the reply.

Afternoons we spent relaxing ; watching the younger generation climbing banyan trees, secretly hoping that the `Great Equalizer,' altitude, would even things out once we were on the mountain; observing Jim Whittaker polishing off his daily five dozen push-ups; grimacing from the pain of squeezing Pownall's grip-tester; or just sitting, clutching a can of beer, looking at clouds and dreaming. On days when stops for chang (a beverage made from fermented rice) were too abundant we often arrived before our porters. Then we would sit up on the hillside waiting for them. Sculpting moleskin pads for blisters took an hour or so, especially for Willi's, outshone only by the horrors on the bottoms of Jim Lester's feet.

There were other constructive moments in these afternoons. Dick and I, sometimes with Willi or Barry Bishop or others, retreated to a quiet tent to calculate equipment and personnel needs of the Expedition. Dick had laid the groundwork for these logistics back in the States. Attacking a mountain of details, he gave shape, with his analytical mind, to the final scheme: start with what's needed for the final day at the highest camp, then work down an ever-enlarging pyramid of supply. How much goes above Camp 5 and what's used there? Add them together. That's what we have to carry above Camp 4. And so on down the mountainside.

`For two-nian teams, how much oxygen do we need at 6?F

`Two bottles per man to the summit. That'd be eight bottles for two assaults plus one pair per night for sleep. How many nights should we figure?'

`We have got to keep it thin for the carries. Let's say three, total. That gives one team a possibility of an extra night in case of bad weather, or if they're late coming down.'

`Well, that's eight bottles for climbing, three for sleep, eleven bottles in all. Times thirteen, what's that ...?'

`A hundred and forty-three pounds.'

`Ugh! O.K. One two-man tent, that's twelve pounds, the Sahibs can carry their own personal gear and air mattresses, and sleeping bags. Now, food?'

`Better stretch that a little farther than the oxygen, in case someone gets pinned down by a storm up there. How about six days?'

`No, that's forty pounds. Four days ought to be enough. Once the oxygen's gone they'll have to come down anyway.'

'O.K. Butane? The three pounders are good for nine hours each.'

`Two enough?'

`Don't forget a cook pot,' Unsoeld said, recalling the day on Masherbrum when he was forced to cook in a hastily emptied tuna can because I forgot to send utensils.

`That adds up to 215 pounds. With six carries, that's about thirty-five pounds per man, not counting the bottle they use to climb.'

`That's way too much for 27,000 feet,' Willi said.

`Yes, but using oxygen they'll only be nineteen thousand inside their masks,' I replied.

`Maybe so,' Willi said. 'But that's still a hell of a load.'

`My God! We haven't figured any oxygen for a traverse team if they come down by the Col. What are we going to do about that?' Dick asked.

`Let 'em rough it.' Willi suggested.

`Well, maybe we can get the high carry to leave their halfempty bottles at 6 and go down to the Col without oxygen.' I suggested.

And so the calculations went, fattening exponentially downward, till all the combinations were computed, digested, summarized, and typed out for presentation to the team.

Evenings were peaceful, smoke settling in the quiet air to soften the dusk, lights twinkling on the ridge we would camp on tomorrow, clouds dimming the outline of our pass for the day after. Growing excitement lured my thoughts again and again to the West Ridge. My dreams were of the reconnaissance of the West Shoulder and the possibilities that lay above. I hoped I would be a part of it.

There was loneliness too, as the sun set, but only rarely now did doubts return. Then I felt sinkingly as if my whole life lay behind me. Once on the mountain I knew (or trusted) that this would give way to total absorption with the task at hand. But at times I wondered if I had not come a long way only to find that what I really sought was something I had left behind.

Something hidden. Go and find it. Go and look behind the RangesSomething lost behind the Ranges. Lost and waiting for you. Go!

- KIPLING

3. Wilderness

Each day was a small world, complete, sufficient unto itself. I jealously cherished the hours of walking, of sitting in the shade, of sharing hopes, of exploring the near beauty and the far. All was pure pleasure; not even growing enthusiasm for the West Ridge could detract from it. Thoughts of the approaching effort seemed to heighten the peace of the march. The time to push would come soon enough.

As we travelled eastward across the grain of the country, blisters healed, muscles hardened, and even the sunburnt red of my balding brow took on a pain-free tan. There was rarely a chance for us to become bored with the terrain. From Yersa we dropped steeply 2,000 feet to the Bhote Kosi, crossed a chain bridge, then climbed about 5,ooo feet up the other side. The first half was quite steep-not much fiddling around with switchbacks in this country-but in the early morning shade it proved enjoyable. The rest, beneath the blistering sun, was fortunately more gradual, past terraced fields extending for thousands of feet above and below us.

At the pass a few deep red rhododendrons bloomed, and small white orchids grew in the gnarled bark of some pin oaks. The distant view was breathtaking enough to be hard on constantly stubbed toes. Ridges and valleys meshed to the north of us like fingers intertwined, each separated by steadily deepening purple haze. Shimmering ice-white in the morning sun, Gaurisankar and Menlungtse rose like gigantic teeth, separating purple hills from a deep blue sky. With binoculars we would follow the white rampart eastward over nameless peaks, searching. Always the object of our search was concealed behind the nearer ranges.

Our daily ups and downs did not quite balance. The farther east we travelled, the higher and more immense the country became until on the eleventh day we crossed into a different world. Our pre-dawn starts had been growing colder, and on this particular morning a light drizzle added to our shivering as we began our climb to 12,500 feet, our highest pass. An hour brought us to the monastery; another hour of gradual climb along the ridge to breakfast. Barry Corbet was at low ebb, pale and unstable after a bout of diarrhoea, but he plodded gamely through the long day. Morning sun, streaming toward us through tall firs, brilliantly backlit the snowdusted needles. We passed some zhos being milked. As the day wore on the clouds closed in on us.

Behind as usual, Willi and I strolled alone through a silent forest of gnarled, moss-hung rhododendron trees. In place of leaves, snow clung to the skyward edge of each branch. The thin winding track through the snow was stained brown by the passing of feet, some bare, impervious to cold. Fog wreathed the trees, subduing the winter colour of the forest to black and white and grey. Existence began and ended here, enclosed by a mist that captured sound and concealed the view. None of the vastness outside seeped in.

Then the forest was gone and we were in high open tundra. Clusters of bamboo poles anchored by mounds of piled rocks marked the pass. The prayer flags at their tops would have flapped in the wind but a crust of rime immobilized them. We paused for a moment, then plunged down the other side, descending through open forests of tall firs, through a narrow wooded valley with a tumbling mountain stream on its floor, finally coming out on the high edge of a new country. Terraces were gone; instead rolling meadows had been cleared from the forest. Stands of fir and pine looked like cloud shadows on the hillsides. A stream wound silver along the valley floor. A few zhos and horses grazed beside green fields of spring-ripening wheat. Beside the trail strawberry plants were flowering and our mouths watered in anticipation. A cluster of well-ordered houses climbed the hill above the stream. Willi and I walked down the wide path toward the village, feeling that we had been here before.

From the beginning we had seen virtually no wilderness. Rice terraces had climbed thousands of feet up hillsides, prayer flags flapped at the passes; paths occasionally edged with mani walls crisscrossed the country. For all the size, for all the intransigent power of the ice-encrusted wall to the north, wilderness, as western man defines it, did not exist. Yet there was no impression of nature tamed. It seemed to me that here man lived in continuous harmony with the land, as much and as briefly a part of it as all its other occupants. He used the earth with gratitude, knowing that care was required for continued sustenance. He rotated crops, controlled the cutting of wood, bulwarked his fields against erosion. In this peaceful co-existence, man was the invited guest. It was an enviable symbiosis. The Expedition surely must have affected this balance: a thousand porters living off the produce of the land, a mixing of peoples, the economic stresses, the physical impact itself. Although we touched each place for only a day and then moved on, I wondered how many such passings could be made before the imprint would become indelible. But awareness of our effect on the land was lost beneath the effect of the land and its people on us. At each day's camp we watched curiously villagers curiously watching us. In the evenings we often

escaped to the future, planning.

One evening we presented our calculations to the team, and there were plenty of questions. Everyone explored the possible combinations of two-man summit-assault teams by the West Ridge with two, four, or six by the Col. Only the six-man Col team was clearly incompatible with a West Ridge attempt. Our calculations showed that two-man West Ridge teams required the same number of carries as four-man teams on the other route.

`Why is that?' Lute asked.

`The dump we're figuring on the West Ridge essentially amounts to an extra camp,' Dick replied.

When the suggestion was made to split the carrying power equally between the two routes, Norman voiced his concern. `I'd like to give a word of warning. Let's not go overboard on the West Ridge. I am just as excited about the West Ridge as you are. I've thought about it, I think, a good deal longer than most of you. But let's not jeopardize the South Col. Let's not make the mistake of throwing all the power, all the oxygen, into the West Ridge, because the Col is still our guarantee of success.'

`This brings up the question,' I said, `of the size of the South Col party, assuming the West Ridge is going to be tried. It's been debatable between two- and four-man teams. I know there are different impressions about where we stand on this.'

`Toni, I don't think we can make the final plan yct.' Norm said. `Everybody has to be at Advance Base.'

`I agree,' I replied, `but if you want to succeed in climbing both routes, the chances are increased by not having a fourman assault on the South Col. Putting two-man teams up the South Col permits a stronger effort on the West Ridge and also increases your chance of success on the South Col.'

Gil Roberts reasoned differently: `Given four men in Camp 6 as opposed to two men, I think you've got a better chance of making the summit. If you have only a two-man team and one of them craps out, that shoots your whole attempt.'

Gil's statement was true as far as it went. But weather was less dependable than health. If you put all your hopes on a four-man team and had a bad day all four would be shot down. It would be better to

send up teams on successive days, and it would require half as much equipment and manpower for two-man teams as for four-man teams. This was my reasoning and Will Siri agreed.

Norm was puzzled. `Somehow this doesn't look right,' he said. `I mean there have been several expeditions that have been uniquely successful with large summit teams. Dhaulagiri is one, Jannu is one, Makalu is-there are arguments on both sides.'

Will answered, `Yes, but these have all been peaks that are substantially lower than Mount Everest.'

`Dhaulagiri isn't, without oxygen,' Norm observed; `that makes it just as high.'

I considered the number of carries required just to move our ton of oxygen bottles to the upper slopes of Everest, and answered, `No, it doesn't, Norman. Logistically it makes Dhaulagiri a hell of a lot easier.'

`Let me inject one thing here,' Will said. `I think everyone is aware of the enthusiasm that permeates the whole group, the drives and everything else. The ultimate decision, let's face it, has to rest with Norman. He's been here before. He knows the problems and he can see the overall picture; and furthermore neither Norman nor I are motivated by the desire to get to the summit of the peak. Neither of us entertains any hope of getting to the summit. Maybe to the South Col, yes, possibly; but I think this gives Norman a little more objectivity than the rest of us, plus a vast amount of experience which the rest of us don't possess, and I think you're going to have to go along with him on certain items, certain concepts here.'

`Unspoken consensus on that point, Will,' Dick said.

Will continued: `I think we should agree at the outset on this. Each of us has his own drives, motives, and inclinations in this no matter how objective we try to be. This is going to influence our thinking. Furthermore, this Expedition as an organization has certain overriding obligations. The mountaineering one is to get to the summit of Everest. The most obvious route, or the route with the highest probability at the moment, is certainly the South Col. If it gives us a higher measure of assurance of success so far as the Expedition is concerned, then this has got to be pushed through.'

`Yes,' Jim Whittaker said, `we all agree on the fact, Will. We must reach the summit. That's the utmost in our minds and all of us agree that the South Col is the obvious route. There is no question of that in

our minds.'

`As long as that is clear,' Norm said.

Jim replied. `That is clear. We know we have to get the mountain.'

`Yes,' Dick added, `All of us understand that the West Ridge is just frosting on the cake and nothing more.'

As Willi seconded Dick's statement, I sat silently thinking I much preferred frosting, and Jim said; `Norman, I think as long as we can have these talks like this and we can align our thoughts so that we can know that your desire is to do exactly what we're trying to do-I mean as long as we feel, or as long as you feel, we're not sacrificing anything on the South Col for this and that, I think that we'll be able to move ahead in the right direction.'

`I think you know me well enough by now,' Norm replied, `to know that I am not a dictator, never will be.' There were nods of agreement. `But there are some basic things I will have to insist on.'

`Right,' Jim said. `That's fine as long as you let us know, so we don't go off half-cocked.'

4. Bouldering

On the third of March we crossed our final pass, the Taksindu Banyang, at io,ooo feet. Throughout our eastward journey the country had grown in vastness and depth. Here the bottom seemed to drop out and a whole complex of ridges and hillsides fell toward the silent thread of river a mile below. `That's the Dudh Kosi, the Milky River,' Norm said. `We'll cross it tomorrow.' His face showed his pleasure in having once again, after several years, come home. This was the place he knew, the Solo Khumbu, the home of the Sherpas. That moving thin line of white so far below was a raging torrent, the largest we would have to cross. It was no harder to believe that than to believe that we could possibly descend to it in a day. The thought of the climb back out again, months later, weak and worn, flashed through my mind and was quickly dismissed.

A sweat-soaked porter passed by under two boxes of oxygen bottles, a 145-pound load and a tough way to make an extra dollar. Norm and I started down through the forests, looking down on the grey and brown tree tops, intricately patterned in their winter nakedness. White islands of blossoming magnolias were beacons in their stark setting and reminded me of dogwood in the Ozark spring. We camped that night on a shelf a short distance below the pass. The moon shone on a haze of rising mist and the smoke of many fires. Beyond the trees, the world spilled into a a silvery moonlit cloud on which the ridgetops floated.

Before the night was half begun, the coughing and talking of the porters began, followed too soon by Danu's banging a spoon against a kitchen pan. The crew staggered from the comfort of tents into the damp predawn chill and stood shivering about the sagging metal table. By lantern light we groped for tea, cocoa water, and Metrecal cookies to plaster peanut butter on. With packs and umbrellas we were off, coasting down toward a river hidden in the darkness below. As the sun rose we broke out of the forest, crossed steep tilled fields past thatched farmhouses, and felt the freshness of the new sun give way to the familiar heat of mid-morning until relief came in the humid shade of the jungle. The trail descended in steps made of rocks and tree roots that trapped the dark humus of old leaves; the smell of moist earth was freed by our slipping feet. Ahead in the clearing, smoke rose from the fire. Dann was there with breakfast. The deep rumble of the Dudh Kosi carried easily through the one remaining thicket.

The warmth of the sun, topping off a full breakfast, breeds a certain inertia, at least in those pushing middle age and having a streak of laziness in them, so I lay in the sun shirtless, my face covered. The world was held at a distance; murmuring voices, buzzing flies, the grass tickling the backs of my legs, the momentum of life at a complete standstill. Thoughts floated lazily, as boundless as the clouds, only to be intruded upon by the sound of Jake's voice:

`Can you reach that little nubbin up to the right? It might take one fingernail.' I peered out from under my hat, squinting into the brightness. Barry was glued mysteriously to a wall on the huge boulder at the lower end of the clearing. I watched, wanting to remain uninvolved, as his fingers groped blindly for a handhold, creeping across the smooth granite with sensitive movements of a pianist. At last his hand paused, on something? Then almost magically his body straightened, smoothly and delicately, the edge of his boot biting on a tiny flake and holding. Jake watched quietly, the serious set of his mouth belied by the relaxed grin in his eyes. Then he took to the slab, fingers dancing over the rock, boot edges clinging to imperceptible exfoliations, polishing the rough edges left by Barry's pioneering performance. They were both fine climbers.

Bouldering, when we could find the opportunity, provided a refreshing interlude. It reminded us we were climbers, not merely walkers and that soon we would be called upon to put our climbing to the test. For now, each brief pitch was a puzzle. Following Barry's and Jake's lead, each of us tried to solve it. Dick's arms had never been overstrong for his weight; his power was in his legs. As a result he had developed a fluidness of motion over the years, and his studied control was beautiful to see as he followed after Jake. In contrast, Unsoeld attacked the problem with the same energetic flair with which he faced all challenges, achieving feats of gymnastic contortion with the grunts and groans of a professional wrestler. Before long he was spreadeagled horizontally across the wall, one hand high above, the other pressing downward against smooth rock several inches below his feet. In the end he got there, at the price of an audience completely drained by his skilful brinkmanship. I followed monkey-style, weight too much on my wiry arms and fingers. Will had been studying the rock, jaw muscles contracting as, like a chess player, he plotted each move in advance. Then he attacked with a determination that seemed to say to the rock, `Either I get up or you come down.' Our ice climbers, Jim and Lute, gave it a try, mumbling about the beauties of cutting steps up steep ice. Pownall, a superb rock climber, didn't join the game-and even deprived himself of the greater pleasure of being a heckling spectator.

It was slow going the day we moved from Pheriche to Lobuje, climbing the 2,000-foot terminal moraine of the Khumbu Glacier. We were new to the altitude and felt it. At about 16,ooo feet, Barry and Jake found a boulder and several people were sitting sluggishly on the hillside looking at it. Altitude itself, I soon discovered, was the challenge in the 15400t crack Barry had pioneered. Tackling the pitch with naive enthusiasm, I found myself folding over on the flat summit, prostrate and panting. What a fantastic difference, climbing from 16,ooo feet to 16,oi 5 ! It certainly added a new dimension to bouldering. Porters would come by, set down their loads to watch our antics, then saddle up and shuffle on. One youngster stayed, grinning. We grinned back. `You try?' we asked. Shyly, he came down to the base of the rock, wearing a pair of rotting boots. He attacked the sharp, narrow crack with a graceless gusto which carried him halfway to the top before he fell off. He laughed, embarrassed, and went at it again, and again. Finally, in frustration, he sat down and removed his boots. As we watched in pained amazement he curled his toes into the knife-edged crack and scampered to the top. He grinned with pride at our cries of `Shabash, well done!' and our predictions about his future as a great high-altitude Sherpa.

We put so many routes up the Lobuje Boulder that there was talk of publishing a guidebook. Coated by a fresh fall of snow, the boulder provided a good training ground for our Sherpas in preparation for the West Ridge. They greeted the practice sessions as children might, jesting, exclaiming, and a little fearful. Uproarious laughter followed when one of them slipped from his holds to dangle at the end of the rope. Many of them climbed with a primitive naturalness that was enviable. It was a universal game.

Yet these scrambles were more than just games for exuberant overripe youth. They were preparation, in a way, for the adulthood that was waiting ahead. Each rock puzzle was a test, though not in a mountaineering sense. Nothing so difficult existed on Everest, on terrain already so well known. This was fortunate, for cold and altitude would make such rock unclimbable. The measure was more of the man than of his climbing ability. Though the performance of others might provide some yardstick, each man faced a solitary challenge. Whether you succeeded or failed on any given pitch, the revelation was in how you faced the challenge, and how Barry did, and Dick and Will. You watched silently, noting the ability of a man to laugh at his own awkwardness. Impatience, self-castigation, the quality rather than the quantity of determination, unreasoning perseverance or reasoning self-appraisal. Impressions were formed, evaluations made and filed away. Competition may have been a part

of these games, but if so, it was purely of an individual's own making. There was nothing inherently competitive in climbing from the bottom to the top of a boulder any more than in running the four-minute mile; you were competing only with yourself. In this bouldering seemed to differ from the effort for which it helped prepare. These scrambles were not Everest in miniature; on the mountain competition would almost be forced upon us for two reasons: not everyone would get to the-top; all of us wanted to.

Norm broached the question of attitudes toward the summit one evening after dinner. `I'm curious about one thing,' he said. `If we're really honest with ourselves, how many of us have real strong hopes, and expect to get to the summit?'

Will Siri scanned the bodies crowded inside the tent. `How many people are there on the team?' he asked in reply.

`Lester, I didn't see your hand up there,' said Norm, smiling at our emphatically non-mountaineering psychologist. `But I'm sure that we all know that only a certain number will be able to make it. That's all there is to it logistically; as many as possible, but there are limitations.'

`I don't think you've got to worry too much about it,' Big Jim replied. `I think the whole team thinks that as long as two men, as long as somebody, gets to the summit, goddammit, that's the important thing.'

The only important thing? What about the individual dreams? How do you reconcile the personal ambitions of nineteen climbers with the notion of a group goal which if achieved by some is thereby achieved by all? Nineteen prima donnas could yield a highly explosive mixture. Perhaps appreciation of this fact was enough to prevent detonation. Or was it the realization that no man's hopes could be fulfilled outside the group's goal, that no one could climb Everest alone?

Perhaps a team devoted solely to the expedition objective would be optimal, a group all of whom could say, `It's only important that someone gets to the top. I'll do all I can to get him there.' Such a philosophy would certainly produce a well-meshed effort. But we were not such a group, and I doubt that such a group would have the same intensity of drive as that attained by a team of personally motivated individuals. With group motivation one extreme, and competitive uncompromising personal desire the other, we fell somewhere between as a team. Two issues helped to clarify where the balance lay:

the question of Sherpas on the summit team and the question of West Ridge.

`I think we should also think of what part the Sherpas will play in the final assault,' Norm suggested. `I'd like to get some of your reactions and points of view on Sherpas going for the summit. But it should be clear to all that this will diminish each individual's chance to be a member of a summit team.'

`Well, let's ask then,' Will said, `if anyone feels Sahibs should have the first crack at the summit if they are able to do so, or whether it should be Sherpa-Sahib teams.'

`I think personally Sahibs have the first crack at it, if they are healthy enough to do it,' Dave Dingman said.

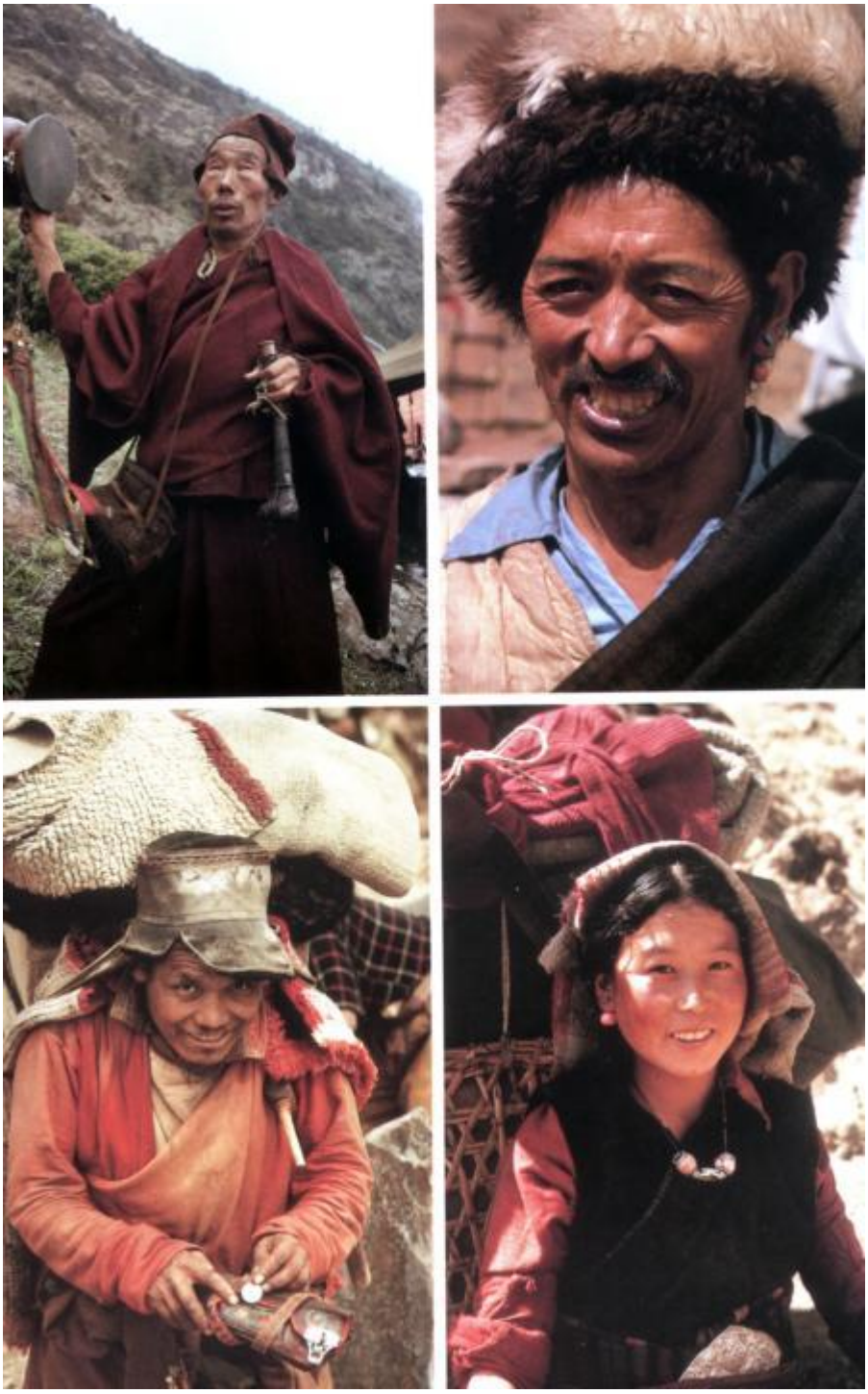
`At least,' said Big Jim, `the Sahib should lead the rope.'

`Well, at least be on it,' I added.

`Many of these Sherpas have been to the summit of big peaks before; there is no question of their ability,' Norman said. `We will strengthen our team if we do figure on Sherpas as members of the climbing team. I think it will strengthen us tremendously.'

NORMAN DYHRENFURTH: Namche Bazar (1955)

JAMES LESTER: Hornbein after chang

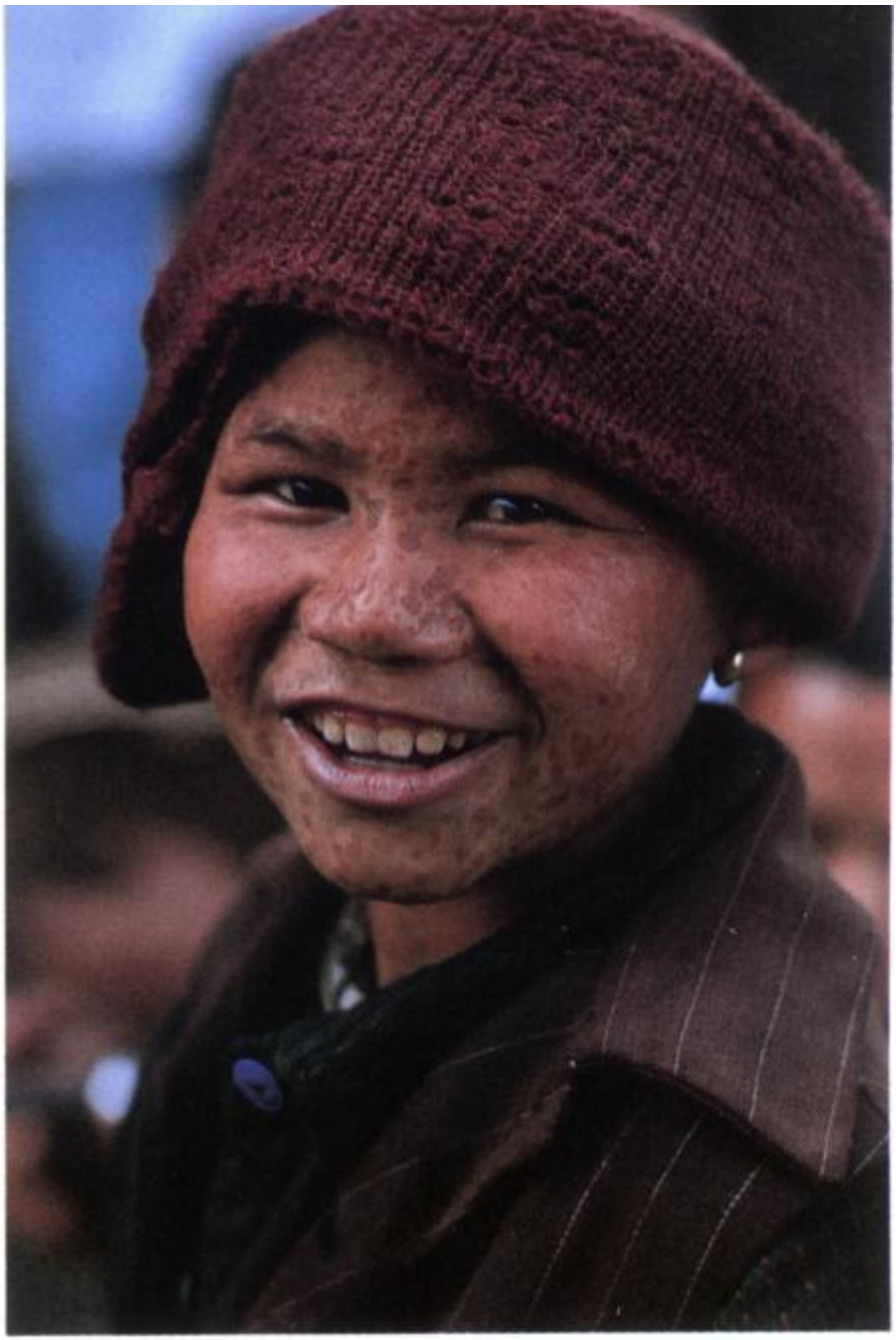


RICHARD EMERSON: The prayer chanter

THOMAS HORNBEIN: Chumbi of Kumjung Sherpa porter Sherpani

porter

THOMAS HORNBEIN: Boy with smallpox scars



RICHARD EMERSON: Nepalese family

NORMAN DYHRENFURTH: Thymrgboche lamasery cruel Klxnrrbila, the sacred mouutaiu

RICHARD EMERSON: Yak above Imja Khola valley, Tamserku in background

JAMES LESTER: Yak train at Thyangboche

THOMAS HORNBEIN: Sunset on Everest above Thyangboche prayer f lags

... For it is a strange fact, but one that has always proved true, that where one man has imposed his domination over the elements another man can pass. The way is open, because the forces of nature have waited for man to prove himself master before submitting. A poor, puny, lonely master, but always since the day when he ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge animated by the will to take possession of the mysteries. And the gigantic and inflexible forces become blunted. One man prepares the terrain for another man; everywhere, in every field of endeavor, the inaccessible and the impossible are only a matter of great patience, a patience which man has within him, not as his own property (in fact, failure deprives him of the benefits of his patience) but as a magic ring which the vanquished gives to him who succeeds in the attempt. Thus, in the long run, the gates open which man at first believed to be remorselessly closed.

RENE DITTERT

The light died in the low clouds. Falling snow drank in the dusk. Shrouded in silence, the branches wrapped me in their peace. When the boundaries were erased, once again the wonder: that I exist.

NORMAN DYHRENFURTH.• Amer Dablam from Pheriche (1955)

(Overleaf) THOMAS HORNBEIN: K inttega f . -om Pheriche

`If we deny them the opportunity to get to the summit and some of them are able to do so, I think we would make ourselves exceedingly unpopular with the Sherpas,' Will said. `Besides, I think we may be

overestimating the number of people we're going to put on the summit. Everest is still a high peak and we're not going to be racing everybody up the mountain. I think the chances of getting every one to the summit who would like now to get to the summit are very, very remote. There's one other thing, too. You may not appreciate this yet, but once you start climbing with the Sherpas they'll become far more a part of the team, and friends, than they are on the approach march. There will be less distinction between Sahib and Sherpa.'

Jimmy Roberts offered a bit of British logic. `Yes, I think technically now, the Sherpas are quite capable of reaching the summit of Everest, possibly without Sahibs. They like a Sahib along. I'd say there was no necessity to make a political thing of insuring that a Sherpa gets to the summit. I thinkjust let things take their own course. I think you'll find that one or two Sherpas will reach the summit. I would say that if one Sherpa has got up, and there are two equally fit-a Sahib and a Sherpa, then let the Sahib go. They've had a lot more work to do on the preparation. They deserve it more.'

`You know, of course,' Norm said, `that the West Ridge will also diminish the number of people who get to the summit. You have to be aware of that.'

`I think the probability of that is extremely high,' I added. `Presuming that you don't even succeed on the West Ridge, as few as two people could end up climbing the mountain.'

`Well, now let's discuss this for a minute,' Norm said. `How do you feel about it? Is this fair in a way, to lessen the chances of a certain number of people to get to the top by tackling the West Ridge? Then a lot of guys who are counting heavily on the summit won't have a chance.'

Big Jim expressed what most of us thought. `I think that for the good of the Expedition we should have an objective other than just the South Col and the quantity of people on the summit. We should have a new route.'

`I would second Jim's point,' Will said. This was followed by many nods of agreement. As things stood now, still far from the mountain, there appeared to be a mature balance between personal ambitions and expedition goals.

Whatever weight personal ambition had in this balance, there was one thing that made competition unnecessary. It pertained less to

summit hopes than to the myriad challenges of productive day-to-day survival on the mountain. It was the simply lonely question asked in self-appraisal on the boulder. Can I?

... Until one is committed there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way. I have learned a deep respect for one of Goethe's couplets:

> Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.

-W.H. MURRAY

S. AtPuijan

At Puijan, mist clung to the trees, trapping the damp cold that had sent the rest of the team off to bed. Jake and I sat astride a log, facing each other, and Lute balanced on a stump on the other side of the fire, his sunburnt face glowing redder in the dancing light. Jake had doubts about altitude. Would he be able to hack it high on the West Ridge? Looking at him, I saw myself approaching Masherbrum three years before. I was unsure, a bit afraid then, more confident now, and told him: `I think most people adapt pretty well, as long as they don't get sick. Some come on a little slower than others, like Dick Emerson. But when he finally got going he was plenty strong.'

Jake looked sceptical, thinking back to the South Face of McKinley. `I really felt it when we hit the top,' he said, `and that's only 20,000.'

`But that's a different story. You were moving up a lot faster than we will be here. You couldn't have been very well acclimatized.'

`I hope that's the reason.' Jake replied.

`Another thing,' I continued, `you can't predict who's going to do well from his performance lower down. I suspect there's more than just physiology involved. Take Clinch. There's a guy who wasn't terribly strong, yet he got himself to the summit of Masherbrum. Motivation counts for a hell of a lot. Sometimes the big strong guys who run all over the mountain lower down don't do as well as the scrawny ones up high. If I'm lucky I might even be able to keep up with Jerstad here.'

`Drop dead, Hornbein. You don't expect anybody to believe that nonsense, do you?' Lute replied.

`You bet. I could never keep up with you on Rainier.'

`How about that day you and Pownall and I battled the blizzard to Cathedral Gap? I was pushing as hard as I could and every time I turned around you were right on my tail.'

`Just superb conditioning.' I said. `And two litres of oxygen per minute running into the mask I was testing.'

`God damn! I didn't know you were using oxygen. No wonder ...'

`But you'd been high before,' Jake said to me. `Isn't that supposed to make it easier next time?'

`That's what they say,' I answered, `but it's an old wives' tale. I felt all right on Masherbrum and I'd never been above 14,000 feet before. Only one of the Swiss Everest team had ever been higher than Mont Blanc, and they ran all over the mountain.'

`How much difference will oxygen really make?' Lute asked.

`The hardest job,' I said, `might just be getting up to the altitude where you start on it. Once you put your mask on you're suddenly down to nineteen or twenty thousand feet inside and that ought to make the rest of the mountain easy.'

Lute was dubious about what the extra twenty or thirty pounds load would do; I suspected that we would find oxygen mighty nice on this mountain. To avoid its use was scarcely conceivable, but climbers once felt differently. It would be purer, more meaningful, to climb Everest without such artificial aid. Members of the early British expeditions came within 1,000 feet of the summit, some of them without oxygen; but a long 1,000 feet remained. Their philosophical distaste was reinforced by a vigorous dislike of the heavy and unreliable equipment then available. Now that the equipment problem was solved, we could still easily rationalize ourselves away from purity: Everest was beyond the limits of uphill survival for man without extra oxygen to breathe; the early Everesters themselves had shown that. Speed, safety, and pleasure all decreed the use of oxygen; climbing was supposed to be fun, not suicide.

`At what altitude do we start using it?'Jake asked, thinking back to the evening two weeks before when we had discussed that.

`We're going to spread the oxygen fairly thin,' Norm had said. `Didn't we decide we are not going to use oxygen for climbing below the top of the Lhotse Face, Will?'

`Yes.'

`Who decided what?' I asked, surprised.

`Below the top of the Lhotse Face?' Bishop asked. `No oxygen until 25,000?'

`Except for sleeping,' Norm hastened to add.

The import of the proposal began to sink in slowly.

`That's unrealistic on the West Ridge,' said Bishop.

`I think it's unrealistic on both routes,' I said, `if you want to...,

'There goes you physiology project, Will,' Norman interrupted.

`. . . to me it's a mistake not to use oxygen when we start up the Lhotse Face,' I finished.

`I'm going to argue against that,' Will replied.

`I know you can climb higher,' I said. `We've done it. Lots of people have climbed a lot higher, but to prolong performance at high altitude, especially if we are climbing two routes and need every man we can get, I think it's a mistake not to use oxygen at the same levels that it's been used by the Swiss and British in the past.'

`Will, what will that do to your project?' Norm asked.

`Well, if you start at 22,000 feet you're going to wreck it.'

`Well, I wasn't figuring 22,000,' I replied. `I was figuring to start from Camp 3, the camp that's just a little above the bottom of the Lhotse Face.'

Norman did a bit of quick recollection. `Camp 3 is 22,800 feet.'

`Yes, 23,000,' I said, rounding off.

It was Will Siri's turn, `We cannot use oxygen below 23,000 feet or we're going to muck up the whole business. The summit of Everest, I agree, is an important objective; but don't forget that the expedition got under way because of scientific objectives as well. Without carrying out the scientific objectives we can't come back with something we can justify this trip with.'

Suddenly Dan Doody came to life, expressing the concern of many in the group. `Yes, but now we're getting back to science versus climbing. Our scientific projects were supposedly designed so that they wouldn't interfere with the climbing at all.'

`It's not,' Will said. `Except on this one point. If we start using oxygen ...

`This is an important point,' Dan interrupted. `I think it ought to be

discussed.'

`If you say we can't use it below 23,000 feet that presents no problem,' I said. `We'll just try a little harder to make sure that camp gets closer to 23,000 and then we'll start using it there.'

Unsoeld smiled and said, `We could let Will go out two hundred feet above camp and put up a red flag. That's where we switch on.'

`You can do without oxygen at this altitude if you're well acclimatized,' Norm said.

`The point is,' I answered, `that when you're first going to work up there, you're not so well acclimatized, and you get a great deal of benefit out of it. It undoubtedly increases your staying power and reduces deterioration.'

`But Will's point is a very important one,' Norm continued. `There's always a danger that once we're on the mountain, we'll get all excited and forget about science. We can't because that's where a lot of our backing came from. We'd be definitely dishonest, we'd be crooks, downright crooks, if we just threw it out the window. We can't.'

`We can't throw the summit out the window either,' Dan said, and Norm came back, `Now wait a second, Dan, let's . . .' and I interrupted:

`I don't think that this represents much of a difference of opinion, and I don't think anybody is going to get carried away using oxygen below that altitude because we don't have the oxygen for it anyway.'

Smiling, I asked Will, `Would it be better not to use it at all?'

`Well, frankly, yes. I hope you all realize that the more you knock yourselves out the better it will be for the study.'

Barry Prather was taken by the thought. `Nobody's climbed this mountain without oxygen yet, have they?'

`Without what?' Norm asked.

`Everybody that's climbed the mountain has used oxygen haven't they?' Barry repeated'

`What are you thinking of, Bear?' Willi asked.

`Why not?'

`Just wait, you'll find out,' was my reply.

Will Siri said, It has already been established as Expedition policy, I believe, isn't that right, Norman, that no one will climb above the South Col without oxygen?'

`Beyond the shadow of a doubt,' Norm answered. `Nobody will climb without oxygen.'

`And if you do climb to the summit without oxygen, don't come back,' Dan put in.

`Or let Lester get a base line I.Q. study on you anyway,' I added, considering the possibility of brain damage at such altitudes.

`I feel there is really a lot of playing it by ear in the wind,' Maynard Miller said.

`I don't want to play with my ear,' Gil Roberts replied.

`Especially not in a high wind,' said Barry.

`I think it's clear that if we climb the mountain, we'll do it with oxygen,' Norm said, `but if we use oxygen too low we're going to defeat this project. If we wait too high we're going to defeat-ourselves.'

`We can try to keep its use to a minimum,' I said, `and this is logistically worthwhile, but with the understanding that when it seems indicated at 23,000 feet we'll be able to use it.'

Will agreed.

The discussion had ended about there. Now, apparently, Jake thought the fire needed oxygen. He poked at it vigorously, sending showers of sparks floating skyward with the smoke. Each tiny light danced among the branches of the trees, to disappear in the mist. There were still many questions and many doubts; assurances would not put them to rest. The answer would come only on the mountain; for Jake, for Lute, for me, for all of us.

6. Thyangboche

The monotonous chanting floated from the gompa, softened by distance and the new fallen snow. Occasionally, horns would add impetus to the prayers racing heavenward. Shafts of evening sunlight behind the monastery gave it a new splendour. The place seemed in perfect harmony with the wild mountain walls that embraced it. A thousand feet below, the Imja Khola snaked about the base of the ridge, carrying the melt from the summit of the world. Ice-sheathed walls soared high, a pattern of delicate flutings and translucent knife-edged aretes. Here man seemed to be reaching for something. His grip was tenuous, inconsequential, yet full of beauty and meaning. His was a world of peace wrought from wildness and latent power. The wildness culminated above the prayer flags, above the immense granite walls of Nuptseup there on the highest point on earth. Framed by dissolving cloud, it hung suspended in space, the final pyramid burning golden in the evening light. The summit plume raced eastward, yet could not free itself from the solid bastion which gave it birth.

The lamas of Thyangboche lived in enviable purpose. They were not halfway to heaven; they were there, their lives spent searching, probing the why of existence, seeking understanding. And maybe understanding could be found here, even of the thing that prevented my staying to seek it.

That night Willi and I walked in the new-fallen snow. We were surrounded by peaks glittering silver in the moonlight: Thamserku and Kangtega, rising almost straight above our heads, the jewel of Ama Dablam shining, and the dark rock of Everest half-sensed over the Nuptse wall. It was a crisp, still night, as we stomped through the knee-deep snow. Chanting came from the monastery, and the rhythmical thump-shuffle of dancing Sherpa feet from a nearby house, turning our awareness to the world of men enclosed within.

`By daylight, the scene is no less wonderful,' I wrote. `Frustratingly so, for I am at a loss to know how to capture it. The summit is there, and seems a long way off, now out of cloud. My mood is one of mid-afternoon lethargy, troubled by a macroscopic awe of my microscopic role in the scheme of things above me.

`Desire for our goal seems terribly strong, or else the dreams I've always cherished are coming more and more vividly close to reality.

Emerson caught me gazing carefully and plottingly at a photo in Hunt's book of the route from Advance Base to the West Shoulder, and chided me for perusing something to which we had both already devoted all the time and discussion imaginable. I smiled sheepishly and turned to a Playboy which showed up in our Base Camp food supply.'

I was not alone. Dave's question had been planted and answers had grown: personal desire had separated us into what would ultimately be two expeditions if an attempt on the West Ridge proved feasible.

With clear weather, the snow vanished almost as fast as it had come. In the sunlit warmth we looked long through Bishop's telephoto lens at the upper fifteen hundred feet of Everest, analyzing each detail of its left-hand skyline, plotting camps, speculating on the route and the problems the downsloping limestone posed on that side of the mountain. Filing by the soggy remains of a once well-stacked snow woman Jim Whittaker had created, to the delight of the Sherpas, we sought a corner of sunny isolation for a planning session. There were seven West Ridgers now: Dick, Jake, Dave, Barry Corbet, Barry Bishop (Barrel), Willi, and I.

The expedition had long before decided that once Advance Base was established, a reconnaissance to determine feasibility of the West Ridge should be the first order of business. We West Ridgers convinced ourselves that it would be best to send up the four `old Himalayan hands', Willi, Dick, Barrel, and me, to do the sleuthing-logic underlain by our own personal desire.

Willi wondered, `Should we send up a bunch of old broken-down crocks on as vigorous a push as this? You could burn yourself out on this reconnaissance. All I can say is that we had better depend on not burning out.'

Dick agreed, and said, `The recon is going to be very early in the game.'

`Yes,' Willi said. `You won't be acclimatized to the Cwm even, and you're going to be busting trail up to 22,000 or 23,000. That can really wear you down. I'd welcome any comments on the make-up of the team, whether you think this is a likely combination or if we ought to include Barry or Jake or Dave, and drop one of us.'

on the basis of experience.' `The composition of the team is sound, I think,' Dave said,

'O.K. Let me ask one question,' Dick said. `In the event that I'm not on the team, I would like to send my little Minifon recorder with someone to record your deliberation.'

`You've just insured your participation in this affair-no matter how sick you might be,' I answered.

Jake broke his usual silence: `Would it be feasible to have more than four on the initial reconnaissance?'

`The idea is to decide whether the route is worth messing with,' I answered. `To do this, ideally we should surmount the step at 25,ooo-or at least be pretty damned sure it's passable. You need no more than four men, possibly as few as two. The number of possibilities along that step and the magnitude of the decision for the whole expedition suggest it is most desirable to have two ropes of two and possibly exchange routes on consecutive days to get a really wellfounded opinion.'

`What we decide on the recon,' Willi said, `will probably be the most important decision made on the entire expedition as far as we can foresee. Once we split into two routes we will have endangered the summit. The whole expedition could go down the drain.'

`But it will have been fun,' Jake volunteered.

`How far above the shoulder do you think you can go in a day?' asked Dave.

`At that stage of acclimatization it will be a miracle if we can do fifteen hundred feet,' Willi replied.

Untroubled by reality, I dissented, `If we go up that snow gully over there we can do three thousand in a day.'

`You'd better have somebody along,' Dick said, `to temper Unsoeld's enthusiasm for that crazy avalanche trap of a couloir.'

`I hope you mean Hornbein,' Willi corrected, trying to shuck himself of any connection with such a far-left route (it was a mile into Communist China).

`That's right-Hornbein's couloir,' Dick corrected himself. `I'm sorry.'

Our idea of the route was based upon photos a few of us had studied weeks before back in the States, but we had no pictures with

us now, only our imaginations. Unfortunately, Unsoeld's picture was different from mine.

`Unsoeld is a deviate to the right, I'm afraid,' I said with an air of superiority.

`I'm sort of a middle-of-the-road advocate myself,' Dick said.

`There goes straight-up-the-rock-wall Emerson,' I replied.

Barry attempted a severe frown. `I don't know about sending all these wild men up there.'

`There's this urge, as you approach the twilight years,' Willi replied, `to go out in a blaze of glory.' Returning to the original issue, he said. `You really have to press hard out there to cross the slabs of the North Face. You'd presumably have to try to get as far as the avalanche trap.'

`Just a minute. Let's change the terminology,' I said, objecting to his description of the couloir.

`Very well; as far as Hornbein's avalanche trap. You'd have to snoop pretty strongly up that. You might have to take two days. There's also the other side of the whole damned Ridge.'

`Hornbein's route is in another country, if anybody cares anything about that,' Barry reminded us.

`That shouldn't be a mountaineering consideration,' I said. `Mountaineering should know no boundary lines.'

`Wouldn't it be interesting,' Willi wondered, `if the Chinese were on the mountain this year, too? I don't suppose anybody would have heard about it.'

Jake asked, `Our job would be to put in Camp 5 and 6? Is this correct?'

`Your job would be to establish Camp 4 and find a route to Camp 5,' Willi answered. `The general theory for operating on the Ridge would be in two-man teams plus Sherpas. We'd have three teams working in leapfrog fashion.'

`If everybody is in good health, we could have four teams,' Dave suggested.

`There's going to have to be a continuous rebalancing between

routes,' I said. `The thing that could hurt us is if things get really rough on the Col route we may lose personnel. We could stand the loss less well than they could.'

`Yes,' said Barry. `On the other route I'm almost convinced that if all the Sahibs get sick, the route can still go ahead about the same.'

`Or faster,' someone said.

Jake sat scratching profiles of the mountain in the dirt with a stick. Barrel, remembering that this was meant to be a planning session asked. `Have logistics been worked out about hardware, ladders, fixed ropes?'

`Yes,' I replied. `We've started, for the recon group.'

`Do you know how many wire ladders we've got?' Barrel asked.

`Ninety feet,' was Barry's answer. `Six fifteen-footers.'

Dick looked a bit alarmed. `That isn't too much.'

`Maynard mentioned he has a couple of caving ladders along,' Barrel said.

`He won't be able to go caving, will he?' Barry asked.

`If we take his ladder, he won't,' was my reply.

Barrel was concerned. `I trust we won't find too many spots like the one we had on Ama Dablam. At that altitude, we're not going to get porters up any overhangs. How high do you anticipate Sherpas are going to have to carry, Tom?'

`To 27, 500-Camp 6.C

`Are the summit teams carrying only oxygen up there?' Barry asked.

`Yes,' I said. `Thirty, thirty-five pounds, mostly oxygen. The others will be carrying thirty-five plus their oxygen bottle, making forty-eight pounds in all.'

`That's a hell of a carry, isn't it?' Barrel asked.

`Yep. We decided we're going to have to hump ourselves on this route,' Willi said.

`No guts, no glory,' Barry added.

The problem of load-carrying over such difficult terrain made it seem desirable to place our final camp below the steep rock step we could see on the skyline, rather than above it. `But I don't think you can hope that one assault party can climb that step and go clear to the top in one day.' Barrel said.

`That's why there are two assault parties,' I replied. `The first one might be sacrificed on that step.'

'We've only got eight hours of oxygen,' Dave said.

`You've also got to leave time to get back down to camp by dark,' Barry said.

Willi thought back to a discussion during the approach: `Gombu told us, "Possible one night out, Sahib. One night sleep out-no bags, no tent, move out next morning." 1

`Up or down?' Barry asked.

`He didn't specify,' Willi answered. `I was afraid to ask.'

`That's introducing a thought that I just don't like at all,' said Barrel, half-smiling.

I replied, `If you don't lose too much fat, I won't mind bivouacking with you, Barrel.'

`Well, I don't know if we'll ever come to that or not,' Willi said. `But maybe so. Standards are certainly moving up in the Himalaya. People are treating the high terrain much more casually than they have before.'

`It might be possible to survive the night, but I wonder how capable one would be the next day,' Barrel said.

`I don't know that I'd like to bivouac too high up there,' I said. `I'm not sure my few remaining brain cells could tolerate it too well.'

`And if you had a wind. . .'Jake said.

`Yes,' Willi said. `Gombu had another interesting observation. During good weather the wind blows from Tibet and creams the Col; but we'd be protected on the Ridge.'

`Doesn't look that way from here,' I replied. `And I would call this good weather. Looks like it's creaming the West Ridge.'

`You're right,' Barrel added. `I've never seen the plume go in the other direction.'

Willi continued. `During bad weather Gombu says it comes like this!' Vigorously he pantomimed a windstorm as only he could.

`It doesn't make any difference where you are in that case,' I said, impressed by the intensity of his wind.

Jake brought up another problem: `A mile out on the North Face. That couloir's a hell of a long way off.'

'But look where it goes,' I replied. `Right to the top of the mountain.'

`Hornbein always ignores the intervening steps in any route,' Willi said.

`There's only one. That one right up there,' I said, pointing to Everest's skyline, three miles above. Conversation stopped, as we stared. Then it was time for lunch.

★ ★ ★

After six days at Thyangboche, acclimatizing to the altitude and waiting for the snow to melt, we moved on toward the mountain on March 15. The walk began with a somewhat helter-skelter descent to the Imja Khola. Our new, unyielding Eiger boots skidded resolutely down the footpocked icy trail, totally in control of their wearers, who followed precariously after. The boots proved fairly comfortable in spite of their rocking-chair inflexibility.

We enjoyed many and changing views of Ama Dablam as we passed around it to the West. Everest dwindled and finally disappeared behind the Nuptse Ridge, but other peaks rose spectacularly into view. The higher we went the colder it got, and there was even a nippiness in the sunshine whenever a slight breeze blew.

On the following day we climbed the terminal moraine of the Khumbu Glacier to Lobuje at 16,ooo feet for the second phase of our acclimatization. Innumerable small peaks about us were tempting. Up-valley a portion of the West Shoulder peeked from behind the Nuptse

buttress. The sun shining on that flat white crest stirred longings to be sitting up there looking at the mysteries still hidden. We sat about the breakfast table discussing the direction our acclimatization energies should take.

Norm started the discussion: `The weather is beautiful and I know lots of you are very eager to get started on the Icefall. You'd like to rush in there and immediately get up. Let me say right now, definitely not today. It's too early. We are far earlier than any previous Everest expedition. I would suggest this for today. Do some minor scrambles; whether you want to climb boulders or go up on this moraine, or whatever-picture-taking-get used to the altitude. I'd like to find out how many of you would like to go up Lobuje Peak.'

As I listened to the plans being made I became uneasy. My only previous experience in the Himalaya had left me imbued with the Nick Clinch philosophy that you have to make every day of reasonable weather count. Particularly if we were to spread ourselves over two routes, we would need all the time we could muster come the end of May. Unable to contain myself, I dove in.

`Can we start the discussion over and first determine the demands on personnel for moving a team straight into the Icefall?'

`There are no demands,' Norman said, `because we are not going to move up to Base Camp tomorrow. I think Tom has been most outspoken about his eagerness to come to grips with the Icefall. If the Icefall has had much snow you can't do much good on it-you won't know where the best route is. Here's my suggestion, and this is based on the experience of two previous expeditions. When we get to Base Camp, we have a lot to do: set up the radio station, unpack everything, organize everything, get used to the altitude. Then, by all means, conditions permitting, we should get started. But let us not be hasty. Let's not rush like fools into the Icefall.'

Committed now, I tried to explain. `Well, Norm, I hate to always be sounding as if I'm in a damned hurry, but I guess I am, possibly. It seems to me that we should be taking advantage, as long as we're feeling fit, of every day that we possibly can. I would frankly like to see a party move up on the i9th to Base Camp and start planning a route up the thing.'

Norm replied, `Tom, there's only one thing. Those of you who are West Ridge bound, I can assure you, are going to have a nasty surprise when you get up on the West Shoulder, because of wind. If you get

there too early, it's going to kill you. It may kill you to such an extent that you don't want to go on to the top.'

Thinking back to Makalu in 1954, Will agreed, `I don't think you should ever underestimate the effect of the wind. It can knock you off faster than the altitude.'

`Yes,' I said, `but the only way to know about this is to actually bump into it head on, I'm afraid.'

`Tom, I am the last man to be defeatist,' Norm replied. `You will never find me defeatist. I'm just saying, I see no point, Tom, and I repeat it, for any of us to get into the Icefall before the 27th. Trust my judgment; I've been there twice. Don't overestimate yourself, Tom.'

`I'm not. I know I'm damned weak, Norm. But still you don't know what the conditions are. You try them out and if the weather is good ...'

Willi came to my rescue. `This is Tom's argument: that there is no question of beating ourselves to a frazzle on the Icefall, but it does seem reasonable to launch an early probe, in the orderly course of acclimatization and all, and find out the depth of snow. As you look at each other over the surface, you say, "O.K. we wait a week." But if it should be just that strange year that the route could be put in earlier, we'd be that much farther ahead.'

`We are right now,' Norm pointed out. `The way the plans are, we are twelve days earlier than the original plan and five days earlier than the revised plan.'

`That's good,' Willi said. `But let's be three days earlier than that.'

`I just don't want to rush up there and right away kill ourselves sleeping too high,' Norm said.

`I agree with you,' I replied.

`It's interesting how we manage to generate some tension just in attitudes when the actual plans that either of us suggest would be identical,' said Willi.

`I said it to individuals and I will say it to the whole group,' Norm said. `When we had the meeting to talk about the acclimatization period, I was being a bit cagey about it. My original plan was always to move toward the Icefall as straight as possible. I personally have

been here several times, but I know a lot of the younger climbers wanted to try some first ascents. When the consensus came, I found everybody wanted the same. I couldn't have been more delighted, but I didn't want to be dictatorial, saying, "We're going to go straight into the Icefall."

Noddy, Captain Prabakher Shumshere Jung Bahadur Rana, our small silent Nepalese liaison officer, sat listening, a little awed by the malleability that characterized democratic decision making. A few days later at Gorak Shep he was even more perplexed by the final turn of events. The Icefall recon group moved up to Base with Norman in the lead, and that same day Barry and I headed off on a two-day climbing lark on an appealing rock pinnacle.

★ ★ ★

Going from Gorak Shep to Base was like passing into still another world. Below there was natural shelter and a gentleness of tundra-covered moraine to offset the surrounding harshness. Passing through the towering ice pinnacles of Phantom Alley we entered the rock-strewn valley floor at the bottom of a huge amphitheatre. The end of the valley was enclosed by the dark rock walls of Pumori, Lingtren, and Khumbutse. From hanging glaciers ice would periodically calve, rolling valleyward like beautiful, short-lived waterfalls. From Lobuje we had been unable to detect the faintest hint of an access to the upper reaches of Everest but now it was there to see. Squeezed between Nuptse and the West Shoulder, the Icefall plunged in crumbling confusion from the mouth of the Cwm to the valley floor two thousand feet below. Here it turned sharply to flow southward as the Khumbu Glacier. We set up our Base Camp at 17,800 feet on the lateral moraine that formed the outer edge of the turn. Huge boulders lent an air of solidity to the place, but the rolling rubble underfoot corrected the misimpression. All that one could see and feel and hear-of icefall, moraine, avalanche, cold-was of a world not intended for human habitation. No water flowed, nothing grew-only destruction and decay.

Yet, as the red tents sprang up on carefully-constructed platforms of rock, Base Camp slowly acquired a feeling of warmth. Al Auten's radio antenna linked us each evening with the outside world. Paths were cleared and bordered with rocks connecting the large living and mess tent with our satellite bedrooms. Within the large umbrella tent we placed our sagging table and folding chairs, the short-wave radio, Gil's

dispensary, and Jim Ullman's carefully selected library. This would be home for the next several months, until the mountain was climbed.

7. Jake

We established Base Camp on March 21st at 17,8oo feet. On March 22nd Willi, Big Jim, Lute, and Gombu entered the Icefall. The route went well. `This morning, the 23rd,' I wrote in my diary, `Barry, Dick and I climbed the old moraine above camp to look with binoculars, first at our footsteps up the snow portions of the pinnacle Barry and I had climbed the day before, then at the five tiny figures moving into the Icefall two miles away. They seemed terribly inconsequential in the tumbling vastness. Finally up at the summit of Everest, the West Ridge shingling down in smooth, yellow strata in a most uninviting, but grossly foreshortened and misleading (I hope) manner. We lay in the sun gazing upward at the highest point on earth, clear against a blue sky, no plume of snow in evidence for a change. Almost dozing, feeling the pleasant weariness and fatigue of yesterday's exertions. Finally down to lunch, polishing our boots, which were a bit denuded of leather after yesterday's efforts. Now think I'll succumb to the delights of a horizontal position as my eyes won't stay open.

`3.45 p.m., still the 23rd but 5 minutes later: a bit of suspense as Prather, surveying on the moraine, saw an avalanche come off the Lho La just beyond Base.'

I picked up the walkie-talkie, climbed up toward him, and called Al Auten at Base.

`Yes, we saw the avalanche' he answered. `No one in that area at the time. But there may be an accident in the Icefall. Heard some shouts. Only see four coming down. Give us a call later.'

Forty-five minutes later the voice came from the little box again: `There's been an accident. An icewall collapsed. A Sherpa's hurt. Jake's probably dead. A party's heading up there now.'

Barry, Jake's closest friend, stood beside me, listening. The words sank sickeningly upon us both. Little more information came that evening from Base and we went to bed tearfully, hoping that there

must be some mistake. Maybe Jake was hurt; he couldn't be dead.

The next day, a dull, snowy, chilly, cloud-shrouded day, there was no longer much doubt, just a soul-numbing acceptance of a tragic change in the way things had been. We plodded with this burden for two hours up the Khumbu among towering neves penitentes to Base and there gathered silently, greeted sadly by those who had been ahead. They told us the story.

Five of them had headed up to improve the route into the Icefall. At the time Dick Pownall, Ang Pema, and Jake were ahead on one rope. Ila Tsering and Gil Roberts had dropped back so Gil could clean his fogging goggles. Suddenly there was a muffled, groaning explosion, the ground heaved, and they were thrown downward. Gil and Ila were unhurt. Ahead the terrain was altered beyond recognition, a shattered chaos. A wall ofice `the size of two box cars, one atop the other' had collapsed. Pownall was half-buried, dazed but not seriously hurt. Ang Pema was found a short distance back along the rope, frightened, his face badly cut. Three feet beyond him the rope disappeared beneath the collapsed wall. Jake was buried beneath tons of ice. He must have been killed instantly.

Gil's shouts were heard at Base. Unable to establish radio contact, and knowing that Jake had been carrying the radio, they sensed the disaster. A party started up. When they met the descending four, Big Jim put Ang Perna on his back and headed down while Willi and Lute continued on. They found the cut end of the rope vanishing into the ice. Willi climbed down into the cracks, shouting into the glacier. The only answer was the echo of his own voice. Still, as the light faded, it was hard to leave. Obvious though the answer seemed, doubt lingered.

My diary continues : `As we sit here at Base, looking straight into the jaws of the Icefall, we all feel the deep, abiding presence of one of us up there, and all ponder the justice and luck, or the lack of it. But now we all realize the need, for more than Jake's sake, to go on up and finish our, and his, climb.'

For Dick Pownall this was something new. He was a powerful, confident rock climber, accustomed to maintaining complete control of his environment. Never in all those years of guiding had he seen an accident. Now a mountain had moved; unfeelingly, it had moved. Jake was dead. It could just as well have been he; for all his considerable strength and skill, survival on this mountain depended upon chance. Man was at the mercy of his environment. It wasn't an easy lesson to

learn. We could see his shock and wondered when he would come out of it and resume his interest in climbing.

I wrote in my diary about how impressively Barry went through the episode and how we talked late that night in our tent about Jake, Barry, and their ten years of rather parallel, yet dissimilar, existence. Jake was a quiet and sensitive individual. As both Barry and Willi put it, he had lost many battles. He escaped to the mountains, sought solace in them, and loved them. This expedition was the greatest event of his life. Barry had never seen Jake happier and more contented than in the last few weeks as we approached the mountain. Could knowing that he belonged in the mountains, knowing that away from them his life was largely an unsatisfied search for meaning, make his death more acceptable? Maybe it made it easier; I wasn't sure. At least this was how we rationalized Jake's death. We tried to make sensible something that had no sense, but inside it didn't help much.

In my diary, two days later, I recorded the surprise I felt about my own reactions and the rapidity of their transformation to the point where I could resume totally functional, if not totally enthusiastic, activity. I suppose this was wrought mostly by necessity to keep going, but it was strange how in some ways my feelings toward our undertaking were so little altered by Jake's death. The first shock brought forth the question: If this is mountaineering, is it worth it? Then answers came: Mountaineering is not the sacrifice of life. We climb, deluding ourselves that death cannot happen to us if we carefully appraise hazards, techniques, and the nature of mountains. Of course, climbing is not absolutely safe, and we accept risk when we climb, making it a seemingly reasonable, justifiable part of the challenge. Therefore, one cannot regret being there when a death occurs, as it occasionally must. One must just go on, thankful for being spared-or quit.

We still had to climb the mountain, for too many reasonsmost simply and materially because there was too much invested, too much at stake for the entire expedition to turn around and return home at this point. It was simply impossible. But this was a miserable justification on which to continue. How could one put in the day-to-day effort, face the hazards and discomfort only because there was an obligation to someone or something that endowed the expedition? Fortunately, there was no question of this. All felt the strong need, the desire, to go on, not only for Jake, but also for each of us individually and as a group. There was no change in this.

But there were changes. Some, like Pownall, lived alone with their

thoughts, fighting their battle silently. Others articulated it: `I'll go through the Icefall twice,' Gil Roberts declared, `-once up and once down.' Inevitably, the question of the West Ridge arose. How could we justify the added risk? Or could we? We all had doubts. Barrel expressed his to Dave and Gil one afternoon. Were there others who thought it an unjustifiable luxury? Gil suggested to Willi that he bring it up for discussion, which Willi did that evening after dinner:

`We had a suggestion made today that we have a group discussion concerning the double route that was previously proposed-that we may be too weak now to consider it. We are weaker than merely by the loss of a man. There have been scars left on different members of us that could influence future performance, and the suggestion was presented with enough strength that I thought it was at least wise to discuss. I don't know how deep you want to go into it. Does anyone have a suggestion or observation?'

Will Siri was puzzled. `What specifically are you referring to right now?'

`The launching of any attempt at the West Ridge,' Willi answered.

`This is presuming that the reconnaissance will nonetheless go on, right?' Gil asked.

`Well, I'm not even sure of that, not necessarily,' Willi replied. `What it amounts to is this: I think it's a feeling that we've all had, at least I know it was certainly mine, that immediately after Jake's death we just wanted to finish with this mountain and get out. Wanted to get off the darn thing as fast as possible, and the fastest way is to pour everything we have into the Col, climb it, and go home. This, I think is the major feeling involved and I know some of us still feel this very keenly. The question is whether it's worth trying the West Ridge or not, in the light of the present circumstances and the further practical question whether we have a ghost of a chance to pull o ffbo th routes now. That's the nub o f the matter.'

Gil persisted. `Well, it would seem to me that whether we have a ghost of a chance or not, it's still a worthwhile mountaineering objective for reconnoitring.'

Will approached the question from a slightly different point of view. `As I recall the discussions we had back in the States and in Kathmandu, I think we all felt at that time that the major drive would be to the South Col-this gave the greatest assurance of putting a team

on the summit. And there would be a reconnaissance of the Shoulder. From Kathmandu to here, there was a growing feeling and a growing enthusiasm for the West Ridge. More and more emphasis was put on this, understandably, and finally it became an equal operation. I think we've got to recognize the turn of events. Perhaps the larger effort should be put on the South Col with a reasonable reconnaissance on the West Shoulder. And if things go well there, then the decision can be revised.'

`It seems to me that a decision on the West Ridge is a little premature,' Barry said. `For two reasons actually: we don't know what the hell we're talking about up there, and I think 1, at least, am experiencing the return of the desire to climb.'

Barry's closeness to Jake lent special significance to his words. If others had doubts about climbing the West Ridge, they were left unsaid.

As Expedition leader, Norman must have felt somehow responsible for Jake's death. It would have been easy to play the game conservatively, but he understood the team better than many understood themselves at this particular moment.

`I hope I haven't misjudged the calibre of the team,' he began, then stated that unless he missed his guess most of us would like to continue as we had originally planned.

One question remained. Could it still be fun, or had this tragedy so altered the morale, the feeling, the pleasure of the Expedition that it could not be recaptured?

After a snowy day's hard work on equipment at Base, it became apparent that the spirit of us all, Jake's spirit too, since it was part of us, and also part of the mountain we wished to climb, sustained itself in us. It was inevitable that tomorrow or the next day, or the next, each of us must pay tribute by passing directly over Jake's grave. With this obstacle behind and no longer a hazard, we must climb the mountain with as much as we could retrieve of the spirit and joy we had when we started, that spirit and joy which for Jake were perhaps the greatest he had ever known.

8. Icefall

With rope, ladder, and bridge we finally tamed the Icefall but never felt we had achieved more than a precarious truce. On each journey through the chaos of ice, past the blue-green crevasses, and over the tumbled blocks that marked the grave, we heard the groans of a glacier stretched on a rack of granite, the whoompf as a block subsided underfoot, and the rumble as towers collapsed and spilled tons of ice. The place was rotting, piece by piece. Pausing to rest, I could relax completely, yet never quite dispel the feeling that I was an uninvited guest.

An aluminum ladder spanned a deep gash near the top, leaning swaybacked against the wall on the other side. On April 2, Pownall, Dick, and I were preparing to descend from Camp i to sculpt the upper part of this wall into a form more reassuring to laden porters. For some reason Pownall asked for a delay. Twenty minutes later, as we stood outside our tents roping up, the mountain started coming apart. The rolling boom drew our eyes to the chaotic dissolution of the icy canyon just below. Two hundred yards away, towers began to topple, walls sagged into rubble. In a chain reaction, the gigantic breaker curled toward us. I stood transfixed, unconsciously bracing myself against the moment our camp should become part of it. Thick clouds rose from the cauldron, ice particles shimmering like tiny diamonds before the hidden sun, then settling as dust upon our camp. When the air had cleared, the camp had not moved.

Pownall was visibly shaken. But for his delay we would be buried under the ruins of the route. For him this was too familiar. striking notes of fear and then perplexity at the fate that had spared him for the second time; it was enough for one day. `This Icefall is much too busy,' I wrote. `I am not at all sad to be above and beyond the Monster.'

On March 31 Dick, Willi, and I had moved up from Base to Camp i. I only made it half way: `Dump Camp, 19,300. Here I sit like a stupid idiot. 7.30 p.m., alone in a 2-man Drawtite tent with a gastrointestinal tract behaving a mite like Vesuvius. About II-3o Dick and I started up toward Camp I, rather too heavily laden, I suspect, but carrying all necessary clothing for our journey to the West Shoulder. We went slowly but fairly well. Abominably hot. Towers capsizing audibly, and once visibly, on either side in the heat of the afternoon. But the route itself seems pretty good with very few suspicious-looking exceptions.

We stopped for a drink and some Tobler chocolate, then on to the dump. Shortly my stomach began to react with intermittent cramps. As we came closer to the dump, pains came closer, nearly doubling me. We finally crept into camp, spotting Willi waiting (he had left an hour earlier, alone, with nearly 8o pounds instead of 6o; still made it in 24 hours instead of our 32). I flipped out of my pack and rushed down the hill. Finally I crept into the tent in chilled discomfort to appraise my condition. Each exertion brought new spasms. I decided to stay here. Willi and Dick left me their water bottles and headed up about 4 p.m. The next hour or so I spent in intermittent agonies, trying to create a space in the tent to sleep, bring in food boxes, inflate air mattress, get myself and precious water into the sleeping bag since with no stove burner here I dare not let it freeze. The ordeal was slow, punctuated at 2-4 minute intervals by return of cramps with each exertion, so I had to lie back and rest about three-fourths of the time. Finally the job was somewhat done, even my pack was hauled in from the outside. I got in my bag and dozed till shortly before 6, then scooted to the door for radio contact, hearing Jim and Al conversing but unable to get through. I learned that Prather and Tashi were coming down from Camp i and there goes my night of lonely isolation that I had hoped to be recovered enough to enjoy. There are compensations, though, in the feeling of security. I don't aim to go down, plan to keep pushing toward the West Ridge recon which, frankly, is the thing I have dreamt most of and which threatens to be the most exciting portion of the expedition, except perhaps reaching the summit by the same route. So somehow my intestinal tract is going to have to shape up in the next two days whether it likes it or not.'

The next morning I was totally purged and boomed up to Camp i with Tashi carrying half my load. I seemed to be going as strongly as any but the incredible Unsoeld, who appeared to have gone manically awry, threatening to demoralize the Expedition by his extreme hyper-activity, hyper-optimism, and seeming indestructibility.

I was puzzled. What was Willi trying to prove? Soloing half the Icefall unroped and beneath an 8o-pound load, for example? Was this his way of leading us all back into the fray again after Jake's death? If so, it must be lonely out there in the front, shouting `Charge!' to a contingent out of earshot. The effort told even on him, for he climbed weary and aching into his sleeping bag each night. And it wasn't quite achieving the desired results. Most of us didn't need such a boost. Some were more cowed than invigorated by Willi's energy, asking themselves, `How can we hope to keep up with that?' Finally, Dick and I hauled him aside:

`Slow down, Willi, you're demoralizing half the Expedition.'

`Don't be ridiculous; I've been holding back so you youngsters can keep up with me.'

But the thought had been planted and it grew; Willi slowed.

9. Reconnaissance

On April 3 Dick and I slogged up the Cwm to set up housekeeping at Advance Base. The long, gradual stroll seemed interminable as we wandered back and forth between crevasses. We paused often to sit on our packs and nibble a bit of fruitcake, and to look at the tiny figures of the Sherpas far ahead.

`God, the camp must be another couple of miles,' Dick said. `I don't think we'll ever get there.'

Inside, I wearily agreed, but I couldn't let Dick get discouraged. `No, it's just over that rise, below those ice cliffs where the Swiss had theirs.' I willed the camp to be there.

It seemed almost too familiar after all the pictures. Familiar, except for the scale of things: Everest, bulking huge above the West Shoulder, Lhotse, foreshortened at the head of the Cwm, the wall of Nuptse soaring a vertical mile above our heads, its glassy slabs of ice shimmering in the sunlight. The Valley of Silence, up which we plodded, appeared almost level, but our labour belied the illusion. Heat, reflected from the surrounding walls, converged at the valley floor. I felt trapped in a gigantic reflector oven. My mind sought some distraction-a poem, plans for the West Ridge, thoughts of home-but heat drove thought away. I found myself counting steps. One foot, then another. Ten steps, and a drop of sweat dripped from the end of my nose; another ten, nope, only made nine before the next drip dropped-drop dripped? Try for ten. Nine again, dammit. Is Emerson talking to himself up there? He must be completely fuzzed by the altitude. But still, where does he get the wind to talk? All mine's used up just breathing.

Not till the homeward journey did Dick confess that he wasn't talking to himself but to the tape recorder hidden in his vest. His demeanour, though not an act, was nevertheless designed to test the nature of my response, which, committed to tape, became a part of his sociological study.

At 21,350 feet, midway up the Cwm, Advance Base was higher than any point on the North American continent. This was the jumping-off point for the two routes. From here we would go up-Cwm to the base of the Lhotse Face and the South Col, or would take `the one less travelled by'. We could look straight up to the point where the West Shoulder bumped against the mountain itself, against the West Ridge.

According to plan the reconnaissance of the West Ridge would have first priority once Advance Base was established. The equipment for the recon accumulated there slowly, since we had temporarily outrun our line of supply.

`One big problem,' I wrote home, `has been with our Sherpas. Perhaps it is the big, fat, rich American image, and the fact that they have been at this too many years, but it is much like a labour union trying to put on the squeeze. It began four or five days ago at Base when they requested a second sleeping bag (the Indians had supplied two kapok bags last year). Instead of saying flatly no, that one Bauer bag was adequate (which it is), we agreed to pay them 25 rupees a month.

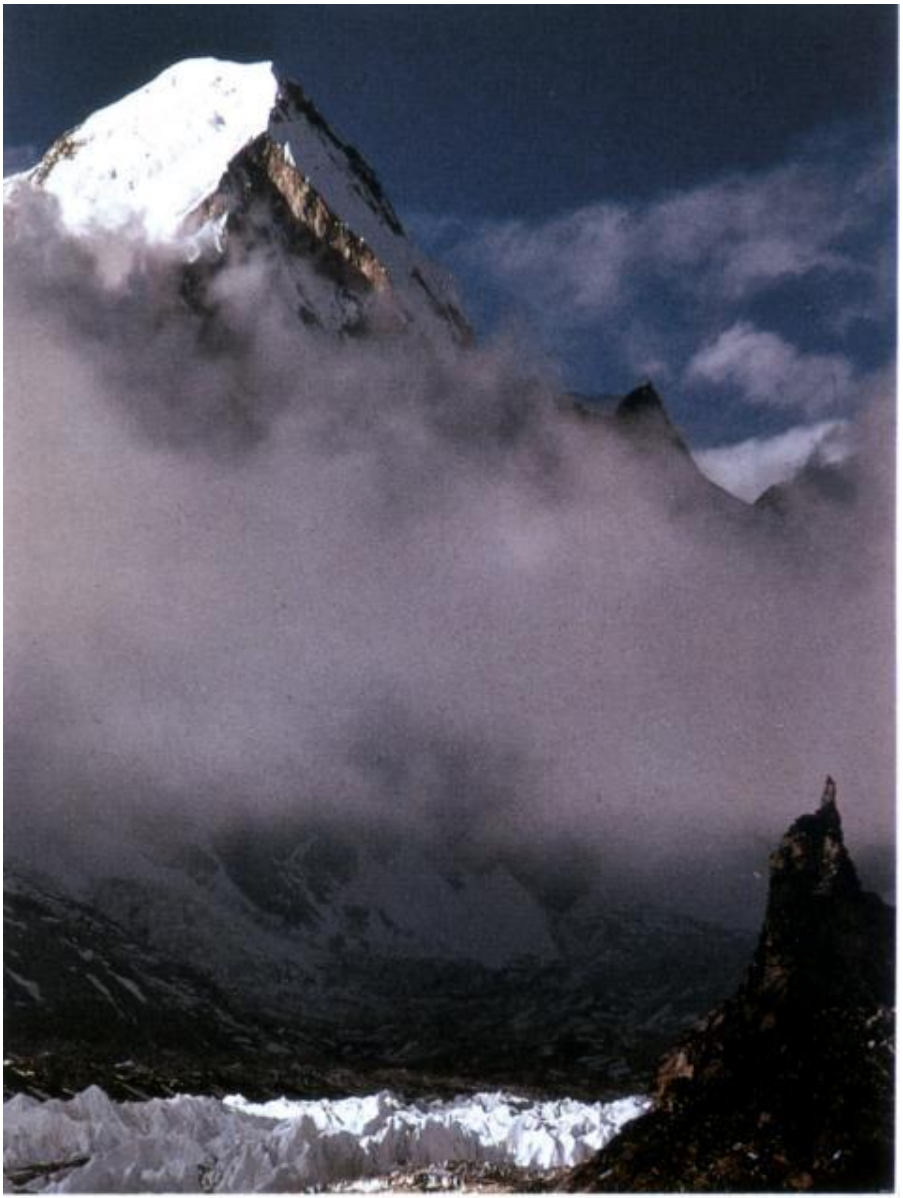
`Next we get to Camp i to discover that many of the loads coming up are 35-4o pounds, not the 5o planned for, and we cannot get our Sherpas to carry full 5o-pound loads to Advance Base. This all adds up to more carries, loss of time, and a diminution in chances of success, at least on the West Ridge, if not the Col. Willi tried to put four oxygen bottles (52 pounds) on one man to Advance Base but was forced to compromise because of new snow (3 inches) and a "difficult track, Sahib". The next day I fell heir to the job and went through the same nonsense ("difficult balance on log bridges with heavy load, Sahib") but finally got a carry up here that approached 50 pounds per man, with much grumbling and unhappiness on the part of all, especially me, for I find such a role not delectable.'

We sat at Advance Base, forced into a one- or two-day delay in starting the recon. I hovered protectively over the pile growing slowly outside the mess tent, taking repeated inventories-pickets, ice screws, fixed rope, one four-man tent, and twelve oxygen bottles-and mentally figuring deficits. All we needed were the stoves and three food boxes. Big Jim, Lute, and Dick Pownall eyed those forbidden goods enviously. As the pile grew, so did their discontent, a discontent derived from impatience to begin the buildup of the Lhotse Face, and nurtured by the oblivious enthusiasm with which I sequestered the incoming supplies. This was the first sign of a conflict that was inevitable between the two routes. From now on we would be competing for manpower and equipment to accomplish our separate goals.

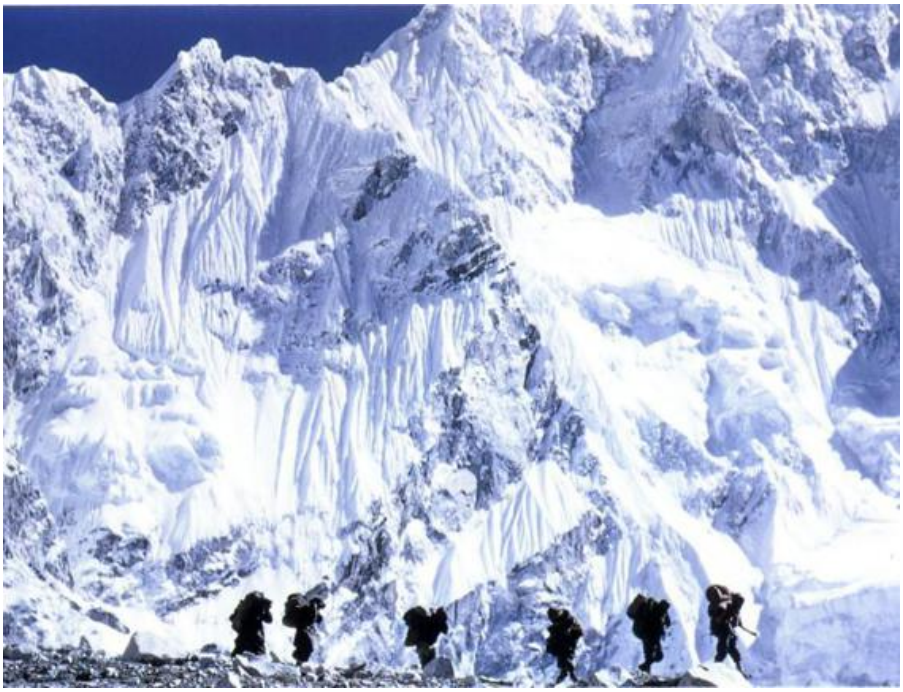
The basis for conflict could be sensed long before, almost with the first separation into two teams. The growing enthusiasm of one team for its route heightened awareness in the other of the competition necessary to fulfill its own needs. As a result opinions were stated

more forcefully-and less charitably-than they were felt. Thus the original separation born of personal desire was accentuated by an interaction in which each team found the other increasingly more vigorous and dogmatic in its own defence. The thing that saved it was that usually we were aware we overstated our cases. Though in group discussion I might be outspoken in defence of the West Ridge, in the privacy of my tent I could readily admit my understanding of the South Coler's point of view and express my doubts about the West Ridge. Others must have faced the same problem of achieving compatibility between their goals and that which they knew was just. The value and rightness of one route over another was solely a matter of where each man's hopes and ambitions lay. To avoid conflict was impossible. How constructively such conflict might be resolved would depend on the maturity and self-control of the individuals involved, and on their ability to compromise.

THOMAS HORNBEIN.: Lingtren



NORMAN D YHRENFUR TH: Porters beneath the Nuptse Wall (1955)



.... our vivid and day-long consciousness of the mountain, of each other, and of the drama which we and the mountain played out at length together, cannot he faithfully reproduced. It has even escaped all but our own general recollection. The mountaineer returns to his hills because he remembers always that he has forgotten so much.

-GFOFFRFY WINTHROP YOUNG

JAMES LESTER: Pool in glacier, Base Camp

THOMAS HORNBEIN: Khumbu Icefall from Base Camp

The first question which you will ask and which I must try to answer

is this, "What is the use of climbing Mount Everest?" and my answer must at once he, "It is no use." There is not the slightest prospect of any gain whatsoever. Oh, we may learn a little about the behavior of the human body at high altitudes, where there is only a third of an atmosphere, and possibly medical men may turn our observation to some account for the purposes of aviation. But otherwise nothing will come of it. We shall not bring hack a single bit of gold or silver, not a gem, nor any coal or iron. We shall not find a foot of earth that can he planted with crops to raise food. It's no use.

So, if you cannot understand that there is something in man which responds to the challenge of this mountain and goes out to meet it, that the struggle is the struggle of life itself upward and forever upward, then you won't see why we go. What we get from this adventure is just sheer joy. Andjoy is, after all, the end of life. We do not live to eat and make money. We eat and make money to be able to enjoy life. That is what life means and what life is for.

-GEORGE LEIGH MALLORY

BARRY BISHOP: Upper Icef'zll from Camp I

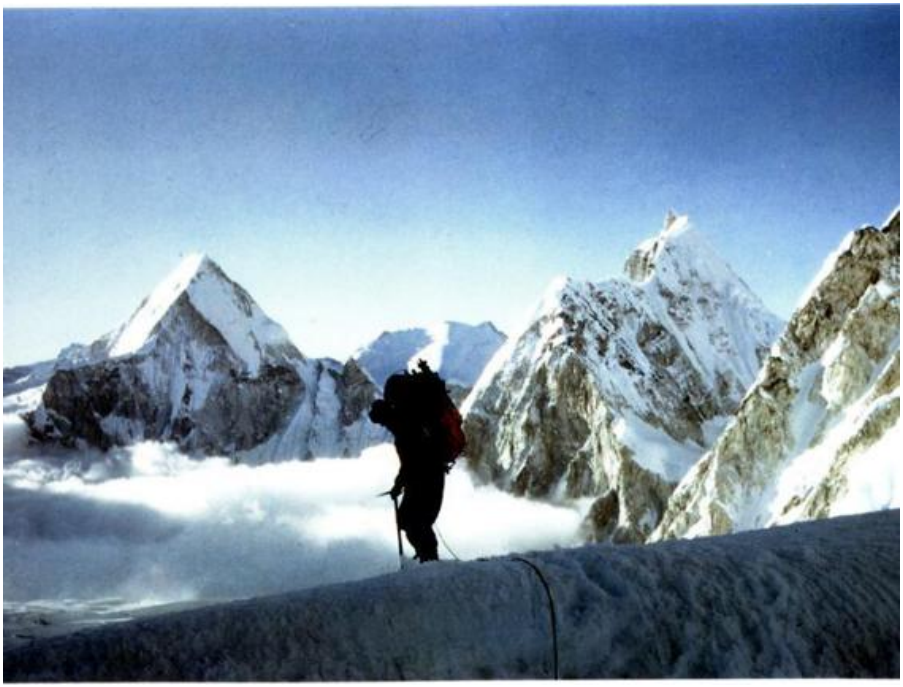
The true mountaineer is a wanderer, and by a wanderer I do not mean a man who expends his whole time in travelling to and fro in the mountains on the exact tracks of his predecessors ... but I mean a man who loves to be where no human being has been before, who delights in gripping rocks that have previously never felt the touch of human fingers, or in hewing his way up icefilled gullies whose grim shadows have been sacred to the mists and avalanches since "earth rose out of chaos." In other words, the true mountaineer is the nian who attempts new ascents. Equally, whether he succeeds or fails, he delights in the fun and jollity of the struggle. The gaunt, bare slabs, the square, precipitous steps in the ridge, and the black, bulging ice of the gully, are the very breath of life to his being. I do not pretend to be able to analyse this feeling, still less to be able to make it clear to unbelievers. It must be felt to be understood, but it is potent to happiness and sends the blood tingling through the veins, destroying every trace of cynicism and striking at the very roots of pessimistic philosophy.

-A.F. MUMMERY

BARRY BISHOP: Climber in Icefall

THOMAS HORNBEIN: Emerson fixing ladder

RICHARD EMERSON: Climber testing ladder



Pumori and companions from near Camp 1

WILLI UNSOELD: Small climber (Hornhein) crossing small crevasse

NORMAN DYHRENFURTH: The Western Cwm with walkers, Everest behind (1955)

At Thyangboche we had chosen the team of four for the recon; now Dick was not to be a part of it. Each meal he ate refused to stay down. Weak simply from lack of food, he headed dejectedly down to Base to

recover. From my own intense anticipation of the coming adventure I could imagine his disappointment. Jake's death left Barry or Dave, who were at Camp i, to fill the empty hole.

`Who will it be, Willi?'

`Dave. Neither of them is feeling too well at the moment. I'd rather save Barry for the build-up. I have the feeling we'd be better off using Dave early since I'm not sure how enthusiastic he is for the Ridge since Jake's death.'

Dave came up from Camp i, not overjoyed at having to climb while feeling so poorly. On the following day, April 7, Barrel, our seven Sherpas, and I headed up to establish camp at the dump site. Dave would rest the day at Advance Base and come up with Willi early the next morning. It was a blustery day, and windswept snow scoured the Cwm. Even old Tashi wanted to turn back at the bottom of the fixed rope, but we were too close to the dump.

`Just a couple of miles more, Tashi,' I said, and his eyes lit as he heard the Sherpa answer to our own frequent questions during the approach march.

Willi and Dave showed up on schedule. Unfortunately, starting at 6 a.m., they had encountered not only wind, but also the bitterness of early morning cold. When they poured puffing into the tent, Willi's hands were beyond his feeling them, but their effect on my bare stomach was something else again. Dave was just plain tired. Our plan had been to push on to the Shoulder to establish camp and begin the reconnaissance, but it seemed like doubtful weather for climbing. As things developed the decision was not for us to make. From the kitchen which was in the Sherpa tent, no sound emanated. It was after ten when Tashi appeared with morning tea.

`Passang Temba headache, Sahib,' he reported. Caused by the rattling of wind-whipped tent?

Another hour and it was obvious that we had been stalemated. Had wind and Sahib ambition permitted, there were not enough daylight hours remaining for a carry to the Ridge. We sent the Sherpas down to Advance Base to save food. They would return empty in the morning to make the carry, weather permitting. Otherwise, we'd come down. We also resolved to keep possession of our own kitchen in the future. The rest of the day we ate peanut butter and talked.

April 9 was clear and calm. The seven Sherpas pulled in just as Willi

and I started breaking the trail toward the fixed ropes. Once around the icy corner we were in the open, switchbacking up steep slopes. The snow was firm, occasionally icy. At least none of that knee-to-waist-deep stuff we lad laboured through on Masherbrum-one fringe benefit of Everest winds. Willi's feet flailed steps in the snow as he steamed ahead. Coming behind on the rope was breathtaking. Each change of direction required fresh gymnastics, flipping the rope, collecting coils, running to turn the corners, then gasping for air as Willi moved steadily forward.

`Dammit,Willi, what are you trying to do?'

He smiled back, thought for a moment, and replied, `Just testing you'.

`For what?'

`Bigger things.'

When the snow is hard and crampons grip well, it is easier to go first than second. You can move at a continuous pace, zigzagging up the slope, while your companion, forced to keep the slack out of the rope, follows erratically after. Willi was going all out, and the figures of the others dwindled below, but after a time it became easier to hold the pace. Finally, as we neared 23,ooo feet, Willi stopped, panting.

`Let's trade off for awhile.'

Now Willi suffered the inconvenience of coming second; the rope became taut behind as we proceeded. With almost impersonal detachment I observed this stretching of my limits, filing the information away for the future and revelling in the pleasure of the effort.

By 4 P.M. we were still below the West Shoulder, which was hidden by falling snow. The late hour, weariness, and sheer boredom with putting one foot in front of the other all encouraged a decision to stop. Our search for a tent platform was frustrated by the flat light that made it impossible to gauge the angle of the slope. We dumped our loads below the bergschrund and began hacking out a tent platform. Dave and Barrel arrived, slipped out of their packs and sat down on top of them. We thanked the Sherpas, promising them a day's rest for their truly long hard carry, a promise that added to the impatience of the South Colers. With only a couple of hours of light remaining, the Sherpas hurriedly departed for Advance Base. Our four-man tent was soon erected. Four people with gear could barely be accommodated

crosswise. Cooking would have to be done in the vestibule. I chose the spot nearest the kitchen, determined that we should fare better than on the deadly diet of Pong. As I unleashed my latent culinary creativity, the old guide sat back enjoying the unaccustomed luxury of being waited on.

Stuffed with curried-ketchup-covered shrimp and rice we prepared for sleep. Dutifully filling in our diaries, another part of Emerson's sociological study, I came to the line beginning, `Tomorrow, if possible, I should; will; would like to-' I scratched the last two choices and filled in the blank, 'Tomorrow, if possible, I will survey the first step.'

Now, at 23,800 feet we were to sample the benefits of sleeping oxygen. Feeling exceedingly healthy after our race, Willi and I viewed the use of oxygen more as a game than a useful necessity. Still there was pleasure in the status symbol, for now we were joining the Big League as high-altitude Everesters. Add curiosity, the challenge of a new experience, and the realization that ultimately it would make a difference, and we were hooked. For me, too, there was the question of how all the gear I had laboured so long over was going to work.

Two yellow cylinders were hauled inside, like fish from the frozen sea-one for Dave and Barrel, one for Willi and me. I explained their use with an aura of confidence to conceal that I had never slept on oxygen before, either. A litre per minute oxygen flow was split by a plastic T to be shared by two, reminiscent of a fine old Cole Porter song. Barry and Dave slid into their polyethylene sleeping masks and with disgusting ease were soon asleep. Meanwhile, Willi and I lay awake savouring the new sensation.

`It's kind of warm inside this thing, Willi.'

`Yes, I'm suffocating,' he replied, ripping the mask off, gasping for air.

`I think I could swim in mine, but the darn thing's overflowing into my sleeping bag.'

Finally we achieved some sense of satisfaction by dispensing with the mask and holding the end of the hose beneath our noses, sniffing oxygen and trusting some unconscious instinct to hold the proper relation between hose and nose as we slept. I dozed, then awoke, searching for the end of the hose in the innards of my well-oxygenated sleeping-bag. Enough of that. I plugged my climbing mask into the T.

That mask would be comfortable. But sleep didn't come. No oxygen. The flow-indicator on the mask delivery tube provided enough resistance to shunt the entire supply to Willi, who was now sleeping peacefully with the hose jammed delicately into one nostril. Then a sudden surge of gas as Willi's nose plugged up and I acquired the total flow. I slept, he woke, and so it went for several nights until we finally made our peace with the plastic aquariums. Eventually they provided all the psychological security and womblike warmth any foetus could desire.

The dewy night was followed by an even dewier awakening. As the sun hit the tent, the frost which had condensed on the inner liner began to liquefy. We could lie in our bags watching the drops form and creep to the centre of the flat roof top. From the growing pool rain began to fall on the captive audience below.

The effort of cooking and dressing is breathlessly exhausting at high altitude, and even the simplest task is terribly timeconsuming. But that first day we set a new record-it took us five hours, not owing to altitude so much as just plain chaos. I had wakened to find myself shoved into the vestibule, wrapped cosily around a can of peanut butter. The place looked as if it had been stirred by a power mixer. The four of us were just the beginning. Air mattresses, sleeping-bags, oxygen bottles, down parkas, anoraks, reindeer boots, overboots, diaries, first-aid kits, radio, were all well mixed. I hung in the vestibule, brewing soup, while the others tried to dodge the interior monsoon.

`Has anyone seen my other rag sock?'

`No, that one's mine-I think.'

Once shod, we emerged into the white open spaces to rope up-Willi and Dave, Barrel and I. That went all right. Crampons on, then oxygen. We'd be using it for climbing from here up. It was strange and new; screwing in regulators, hooking on delivery tubes, valves open, flow at two litres per minute.

Finally at noon we were off into the fog, headed toward the crest of the West Shoulder for the long-anticipated view. Here there was no question that oxygen made a difference ; climbing was a delight. There was a little extra spring in the step, a reserve of energy and alertness to meet the unexpected. Best of all there was freedom to think about more than the alternate plod-pant-plod, with ten breaths per plod; there was freedom to enjoy the view, and to have thoughts

to be alone with.

I was very much aware of the rubber mask on my face because I had designed it. On Masherbrum our single attempt to use oxygen ended because of the effort required to breathe through the masks. That same summer Gombu and two Indian companions were turned back high on Everest when they couldn't remove ice that had formed on the breathing valves of similar sets. The same type of mask had got the British and Swiss to the top of Everest, but in ideal weather. The idea for a far simpler and more reliable mask took shape in my mind during my research on respiration. Fred Maytag's enthusiasm brought it to reality. His company was more accustomed to manufacturing washing-machines than highaltitude oxygen masks, but members of the research division spent many extra hours creating a mould which permitted the entire unit to be made as a single piece of rubber. The result was a mask with one valve instead of six. It could be deiced by simply squeezing the rubber breathing-cone with a mittened hand. Though climbing was one adventure Fred Maytag had not tasted, he understood it and enjoyed being part of our undertaking. He died of cancer three months before the expedition departed.

The mask fitted comfortably, even around a nose like mine; the goggles didn't fog from my breath. I watched the oxygen bladder expand and contract with each breath, fascinated by its motion. I consciously overbreathed to accentuate the movement.

Suddenly, I felt the rope come tight as Barrel shouted breathlessly: `Slow down, Tom!' He was having trouble getting synchronized with his oxygen. In my fascination with the equipment, my pace had increased considerably, gradually narrowing the gap to Willi and Dave, who had started earlier. Willi, looking back, saw us coming.

`Aha,' he thought. `Hornbein's trying to beat me to the Shoulder.' He brought Dave up to him. `Let me check your flow, Dave,' he said, unobtrusively turning Dave's regulator to a full flow of four litres per minute, and off they went.

Unaware of the competition I had provoked, I paused and brought Barrel up to me. After checking his oxygen equipment, I suggested that he set the pace. Ahead, Willi's feet flailed like piledrivers into the snow. The gap between the two ropes steadily widened. What drive, I thought, but what's his hurry? What's he trying to prove and who to? I'd never climbed with anyone so intensely competitive. I wondered if the competition was more than just a game, how much it accounted for his tireless drive, his choice of route.

As essentially a non-competitor myself, I could not say. Yet I was lured into the simple childlike fun of the game. Could I keep up with Unsoeld, whose power on Masherbrum I too well recalled? I thought back to the day nearly three years before when I was toiling uphill at 23,000 feet, heavily laden. Willi, starting an hour later had steamed past me under the burden of a huge army rucksack.

`Can I take your pack, Tom?' he had shouted from fifty yards ahead.

`No thanks, Willi,' I had answered, sagging to the snow, `I'll die first.'

The game he lured me into now was rather ridiculous, as Dick pointed out later, when Willi, with unnecessary relish, described how we had tried to run each other into the ground. Though the game could tell me I might have the steam to keep up with him, it left untouched the more basic question of my relationship with the mountain and myself.

Willi and Dave were sitting nonchalantly on their packs staring into blank nothingness when Barrel and l joined them. For the next three hours we all sat transfixed, as the mists played ethereal games, parting to reveal tantalizing glimpses of what we had come to see. All round us was a confusion of vignettes as momentary rifts in the curtain unveiled the dine outline of the North Col, or of improbable bastions, belonging presumably to the West Ridge, or of rock floating free, fantastically high above. During the course of the afternoon, we must have glimpsed most of it, but only piecemeal, as isolated bits of a puzzle which seemed fearsomely greater than the sum of all its parts-a jumble of black, snow-etched walls and aretes that ended nowhere.

After waiting in vain for the unveiling of all we'd long anticipated in our dreams, we returned at four, chilled and snowed-upon, to the chaos of our tent. There was little to cheer about but a lot to anticipate. If only the mountain could be divested of its modesty. A reconnaissance is a hard chore to perform if you can't see anything. Not deterred by our lack of success, I closed my diary that day with: `Tomorrow, if possible, I will go above the first step.'

On the i i th we got away an hour earlier. At the Shoulder the mountain waited, fully assembled. The cloud cauldron of the great South Face boiled, accentuating the black, twisting harshness of the West Ridge. We stared. Yesterday's fragments had not exaggerated. Our eyes climbed a mile of sloping sedimentary shingles, black rock, yellow rock, grey rock, to the summit. The North Col was a thousand

feet below us across this vast glacier amphitheatre. As we stood where man had never stood before, we could look back into history. All the British attempts of the 'twenties and 'thirties had approached from the Rongbuk Glacier, over that Col, on to that North Face. The Great Couloir, Norton, Smythe, Shipton, Wager, Harris, Odell, our boyhood heroes. And there against the sky along the North Ridge, Mallory's steps. Everest was his more than any other man's. In 1924, as he approached the mountain from which he was not to descend, he had written : `Still the conquest of the mountain is the great thing, and the whole plan is mine and my part will be a sufficiently interesting one and will give me, perhaps, the best chance of all of getting to the top. It is almost unthinkable with this plan that I shan't get to the top ; I can't see myself coming down defeated.' This was the legacy we now looked upon. Our Ridge looked formidable. Once again the fear was there, and with the fear, the challenge: but how?

`That must be Hornbein's Couloir over there,' Barrel said.

`You're right. I think it is.' I replied.

`It's a long way over, Tom,' said Willi.

`It sure is,' I said. `I'm not even sure how to get into it unless we can traverse from here.'

`How about that crack diagonally up through the cliff, just left of where the Shoulder meets the Ridge?' Dave asked.

`Yes, that looks possible,' Willi agreed. `From there we can either cross to Hornbein's Couloir, if we have to, or cut back up Jake's to gain the West Ridge above the first step.'

`Sounds reasonable,' I said. `But those cliffs overhanging Jakc's Couloir don't look too inviting.'

`Not without a lot of preparation,' Willi said. `But it's an awful lot closer than that avalanche gully of yours. That's a couple of miles over there and we're not even sure it cuts through the Yellow Band.'

`I don't see any signs of avalanche from it, though,' I replied.

`No, but just wait till it snows,' Willi said.

The plan was for Willi and me to try to reach Hornbein's Couloir. Barry and Dave would tackle the Ridge itself, nearer, but less appetizing. We headed out, following the corniced edge. Finally,

where the cornice faded, we stepped across into Tibet. As we climbed, the cauldron overflowed and once again the mountain was lost in cloud. At 24,500 feet we nibbled a bit of frozen tuna and fruitcake, waiting in vain for some hint of our objective. Toward three we turned back, picking up Dave and Barrel on the way.

It was hardly a cheerful evening. The two days of reconnaissance originally planned were gone. Our hope had been to surmount the first step, but thus far we hadn't even reached the base of the Ridge. This side of the mountain could be climbed by a well-equipped, full-scale attempt; chances for a small offshoot of the major effort seemed pretty slim. For Sherpas to carry loads over that rock would require days of route preparation with fixed ropes and ladders. It seemed hopeless.

Dave was for going down in the morning. `We shouldn't burn ourselves out here for nothing,' he said. `They can use us on the Col.' The logic was sound, except that there were too many people on the Col already. Willi, Barrel, and I felt a gnawing doubt. How much might the weather and our poor acclimatization be influencing our judgment? We hadn't even set foot on the rock yet, and views through binoculars can be notoriously deceptive, particularly head on. There couldn't be much up there to change our minds, but we owed it to ourselves to take one more look. Enough oxygen remained for that. If we were to write it off, at least we'd like to go as high as we could, just for the hell of it. So we left it up to the weather. In my diary I willed myself a little higher. `Tomorrow, if possible, I will get to the Couloir.'

The I2th started clear. I had the ice melting at six, and by eight, as the interior rain began to fall, we were through breakfasting on meat loaf from the evening before. Still, it was ten before we were under way. Half an hour later, even on a full flow of oxygen, Dave decided he couldn't make it. He had fared poorly, plagued with the same symptoms of incomplete acclimatization he'd had at Camp i. This led to a lack of enthusiasm for the route, which made him possibly the only realist among us. We watched him safely back over the bergschrund to the tent, then re-roped, with Barrel in the middle, and continued on to the Shoulder. Everest stood clear, rid even of its wind-blown banner. Ten thousand feet below, the Rongbuk Glacier wound northward into brown Tibetan hills. Ice towers on the glacier appeared as hundreds of tiny, ice blue gems. Through binoculars we sighted the remains of the Rongbuk Monastery in the rubble left by the receding ice. It had been destroyed by the Chinese a few years before.

Yesterday's high point came easily by i p.m., then we were on new terrain. Clouds coalesced, a light snow fell, crampons scraped across outsloping rock and scratched superficially on glare ice. As I strolled along in the rear for the time, I mused on the inadequacies of an ice-axe arrest on such an ice-rink surface. Just don't fall, that's all, I thought. Climbing on his front crampon points, Willi led up a tiny fissure diagonally transecting a bulge of glare ice. At the top he rammed his axe into the crack to belay Barrel. Waiting below, I discovered Barrel was tied in closer to me than to Willi. He would be unable to reach Willi's stance unless I moved along with him. His expression of astonishment as he turned to belay me and found me standing behind him was worth the lack of protection it cost in climbing up there.

With time for thoughts as we strolled along, I began to play games with my oxygen. Willi was leading on two litres. At that flow I could hold the pace with a reserve that allowed for reverie; on one litre it was an effort, and with the oxygen turned off I could barely keep up, my heart and lungs pounding to their limit. In another game, I would squeeze the entire contents of the rubber oxygen bladder into my lungs with a single, deep breath. In effect, this suddenly returned me to sea level. Within three or four seconds the bolus of welloxygenated blood reached receptors, which sent their message to my brain. Momentarily my breathing almost ceased, and the fleeting respite from panting was pure pleasure.. As the oxygen-rich blood reached my fingertips, they changed from purple to bright pink-and to purple again as I was suddenly returned to high altitude.

Perhaps there was too much time for thought. Somewhere during the course of our journey my objectivity succumbed to emotion. I decided the West Ridge was worth a try; I only hoped Willi would agree. Otherwise, we'd go clear to the base of the Couloir, if necessary, to convince him. Although this would mean wandering back to camp in the dark, the prospect seemed less forbidding at the moment than it should have.

At four we reached the rock, 25,100 feet, according to the altimeter. The Diagonal Ditch rose immediately above, to dissolve in fog and swirling snow. What we could see didn't look unreasonable, but we couldn't see much. We sat on the down-sloping slabs, munching rum fudge.

`All right, Willi. Have you made up your mind? Or do we have to go higher still?'

`I'm convinced, Tom. This is far enough for today.'

So the decision was made in the pit of our stomachs. Perhaps the day's walk had provided only the solitude for a necessary bit of introspection.

All doubts that might have lingered were removed moments later when we traversed the hundred yards to the ridge crest, where the West Shoulder butts against the mountain itself. Here, at the very inception of the West Ridge, was a flat platform of wind-rippled snow, roomy enough to house all the tents we would require. The far edge was bounded by a rock promontory from which we peered past our feet at the tiny cluster of tents nestled in the Western Cwm. The summit of Nuptse was directly across the way, now scarcely above us. Lhotse filled the end of the Cwm, for the first time unforeshortened. In the foreground Everest's South Face rose four thousand feet and fell an equal distance to the Cwm. The summit of the mountain was hidden. To the north, the slope rounded from view-dropping to the Rongbuk Glacier. The scene was clothed in a seductive beauty of boiling clouds, glazed golden by the brilliance of the evening sun, cloud shadows alternating with shafts of sunlight which bathed the ridges and reflected intensified from millions of tiny ice crystals floating in the cooling air. Was this the mountain's design to capture us? All doubt about our decision vanished with the spectacular dissolution of the storm. We headed down.

Dave was perplexed by our decision. He had been busy discarding food during our absence, convinced our departure the next day would be permanent.

`How did the route look?' he asked.

`Well, we really couldn't see much. Mighty cruddy rock though. But you should see the beautiful place for 4W. It's worth a try just to be able to live there a while.'

And so the decision was made. We'd be back up. My diary reflected my weary bliss: `Tomorrow, if possible, I will go restfully to 2.'

10. The Lost Weekend

We reached the intersection with the main thoroughfare leading from Advance Base to the foot of the Lhotse face. It was now a well-worn groove in the snow. Slogging that last level quarter-mile into camp, I consciously put a little more spring in my weary steps and noted Willi doing the same thing. The warm congratulations we received made us glow with satisfaction. `Great job,' Big Jim shouted as Norm pumped our hands, and Will Siri smiled his agreement. `You reached 25,000 feet? How does it look above?' Chotari unfastened our crampons. Cups of steaming lemonade were thrust into our hands. The moment was ours.

But not for long. As we sat on food box seats around the food box table finishing lunch, Norman called a meeting. In our absence the South Colers had decided on four-man assault teams, instead of two-man teams, for the Col route. The first team would be Lute, Pownall, Big Jim, and Gombu. It hadn't been decided who would form the second team. Recalculating our original logistics they had concluded that four-man teams would require little more equipment and carries than called for in our original two-man estimates. Unprepared, and too weary to question, we accepted this with blind faith. Within a week or ten days, we were told, the South Col would be stocked for the final push. This would require that all the carrying power be thrown into the Col build-up for the present. The West Ridge would have to wait until they were through.

Only an American expedition would attempt to vote itself to the top of Everest. Our approach to decision-making was at times exorbitantly democratic. The minority group, particularly if absent when the vote was taken, was inclined to suffer. We found ourselves preserved of the basic freedoms of speech, and the right to the pursuit of happiness (the West Ridge), but no inalienable rights to Sherpas. We were at a standstill. Norm offered us the opportunity of becoming the second team of four on the Col route. In the thin-walled privacy of our tent Willi and I mulled over events. His unconvincing rationalizations were an attempt to sooth my anger. I felt let down on something that I thought had been agreed upon by the entire expedition weeks before: that we should push the two routes simultaneously.

`Dammit, how could they do it to us? And four-man teams instead of two ! That could ruin us, Willi. And it doesn't help their chances either! How can you be so damn calm?'

`Got to, Tom. Just to keep you out of trouble.'

Two other events compounded the irony of the afternoon, making our commitment to the West Ridge irrevocable. Dave informed us he'd like to change to the Col route. The risks of the West Ridge seemed unjustifiable to him. `It's just not my kind of climbing.' Jake's death had dealt the first blow to his enthusiasm, poor acclimatization the second. Later he told Willi that he feared my fanaticism would overextend the whole effort.

Barrel came into the tent that evening, glum and apologetic. The mail, he said, bore grim news from the National Geographic. `I sure feel bad letting you fellows down, but I'm going to have to switch routes. I'd far rather tackle the West Ridge, but I'm on assignment and I am supposed to get pictures from the top. I've talked to Norm and he says I can go in the second assault. But, believe me, if it weren't for the pictures I'd be with you. And as soon as we get done I'll be back over and do everything I can in support.'

`Sure, Barrel,' Willi replied, `we understand. It's tough. I don't envy you, having to climb Everest by the Col.'

What had once been a team of seven was now three and a half: Barry, Willi, me, and, as a question mark because of his health, Dick. How could we possibly hope to climb a new route on the highest mountain in the world with so few Sahibs? And no Sherpas? Maybe we should take Norm up on his offer, and flush the West Ridge? Nuts. That's no way to climb a mountain. The Col route's been paved. All we have to do is stroll up in their footsteps.

`No,' I said to Willi, `let's talk them out of a couple of Sherpas and try to make the winch work. There's no other possibility.'

We were stripped to the bone of manpower, but we were a core of like-thinking individuals. We would rather try the unknown and fail than risk being successful on what Tashi had dubbed `the old milk run,' though who had added this expression to his colourful vocabulary I could only guess. That evening we declined Norm's offer, presented our plan to try the winch, and won Tashi and Nima Tenzing to help us in the days ahead. The first threat to our existence was past, and though we were hardly running, at least we were still alive. My entry into Emerson's diary for that night was `Tomorrow, if possible, I will calculate logistics for the West Ridge.'

To Gene I wrote: `This brings me to some of the imponderables.

Why do the four of us isolate ourselves from the optimal chance to stand on the highest point of this earth? Something about the Col route, not to sell it short, is too familiar, too travelled. Not that I wouldn't go to the summit by it if the West Ridge failed; I would. But do not be surprised or disappointed to find your husband's name among the missing when the clippings pour forth. Also do not feel I will be missing fulfillment, for whether or not I find it on the West Ridge, I know it does not lie in wait as the 9th, loth, i i th, or 12th, or even the 1st American to climb Mount Everest by the South Col.

`More positively, there's the real attraction of a new route, a route that looks feasible for a small determined group. The challenge is to see if we can pull it offon a shoestring-with an adequate margin of safety but without unlimited reserves. Our hope is lightness, speed, and a hell of a lot of luck. Still I marvel at the relative ease with which I decided to bypass a much greater guarantee of success for a bit more challenge and gamble, a bit more opportunity for failure-and therefore a lot more feeling of accomplishment should we pull it off.'

It was what Willi called, `the spiritual moral, and mountaineering correctness of the only route worthy of our efforts'.

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One day bled into another ; our progress was limited to replotting logistics, paring a little food here, eliminating oxygen or a tent there. Before we were through we had reduced the size of our effort to almost half our earlier estimate.

About 8 a.m., timed perfectly with the sun, Danu would make his rounds and outside our tent we would hear, `Good morning, Sahib. Tea?' It came sometimes with sugar, sometimes with milk and sugar; after a time I developed a growing lack of interest in tea in any form, and it became merely a medicine to help maintain hydration. There were days when I would open half an eye, mumble a drugged `No thanks,' and retreat deeper into my cocoon for an extra hour's sleep before breakfast. Other times I would clutch the warm cup in both hands, sipping so slowly that the tea was only half gone when Mingma came to pick up the cups. Willi downed his quickly and dove back into The Making of a President, i 96o, reading aloud to his lazy companion.

Looking over at me one morning he asked, `What time did you get

to sleep last night?'

`Couple of hours ago, I guess. But, boy, what a lot of thoughts I had. I replotted the logistics for the last two camps. All we need above Camp 4 are one two-man Gerry tent and one four-man Drawtite.'

`How do you figure that?'

`Well, its sort of like musical tents. The recon team will take the Gerry over for their night at W. When the first assault comes the next day the four Sherpas will bring a big Drawtite to sleep in while the climbers use the Gerry. Then we'll just unpitch the Gerry and take it up to 6W on the final carry.

Finally, comprehending the genius behind this manoeuvre, Willi said, `The only hooker is if the recon team gets down too late to get back to 4W the same day, it'll be a mite crowded with four men sitting up all night in a two-man tent.'

`Well, that adds a bit of sport,' I said. `Do you think we can get by on only one flashlight for each summit team? And one radio each?'

`Sure. But we'll have to carry the radios over the top. They're too good to leave behind.'

And so it went. The daylight hours were often spent doing little and accomplishing less in our high sunny world, trapped between the walls of Nuptse and Everest. The heat and stillness were oppressive. Sometimes I would want to take my temperature to make sure I wasn't sick, but it was only glacier lassitude-we called it the `Cwm gloom,' which was not gloom but a delightful lethargy that must be the Himalayan substitute for sex. We would postpone from one day to the next the relevelling of our tent site to avoid sleeping-or not sleeping-in a corkscrew, downhill position. Each afternoon clouds filled the Khumbu Valley, then spilled over into the Cwm. The enervating heat gave way to light snowfall and a delightful coolness as the cloud engulfed us.

`Let's bring in Lester and brainwash him,' I suggested to Willi one day.

`Good idea. Every psychologist must have problems.'

We would spend the afternoons flat on our backs in the tent, analyzing each other.

`Well, there's not much use trying to make Hornbein over,' Willi said; `he's so satisfied with his miserable existence the way it is now.'

Others were not in the sack so much of the time. Lute Jerstad and Dick Pownall reached the South Col on April 16, an incredibly early date compared to past expeditions. They came into Advance Base dead tired but triumphant at 9.30 that night with souvenirs from the junk yard at the Col.

`You mean you actually had your mittens off up there? Wasn't it windy?'

`Yes,' said Pownall, `but it wasn't too cold. The Sherpas kept right up without oxygen. Chotari knew a short cut around the Geneva Spur but we didn't discover it till after we'd gone over the top.'

`By the way, Tom,' said Lute, `my oxygen lasted nine hours on a three-litre flow.'

That was fine, but there wasn't that much oxygen in a bottle. It was time for me to recalibrate the regulators.

We were at an altitude above which man cannot stay indefinitely. The highest permanent habitation is at about 17,500 feet in Bolivia. One cannot stay healthy much higher. For permanent mountain populations, survival is difficult; the miscarriage rate is too high-but then that wasn't a problem for us. Nevertheless, at 21,350 feet our Advance Base Camp was above the mysterious line, and we were all keyed to detect the first signs of high-altitude deterioration: little, non-specific things, such as increased irritability, loss of appetite, weakness, and waning enthusiasm for the task at hand. At dinner, plates would be left half full. Even Barry Prather, who had consumed more than 8,ooo calories a day lower down, just nibbled at his food. Dick Pownall's once massive legs wasted as he sat and stared at, and considered tasteless the repast set before him. Complaints increased as our diet became more boring.

`We're having chicken tetrazzini again tonight? We had it last night.'

`No, that was chicken a-la-king. Can't you tell the difference?'

`No, it all tastes like cardboard.'

The periodic weighing sessions that were part of Will's research demoralized us further.

`I've lost thirty pounds already.'

`That's nothing. I'm down thirty-eight.' Will seemed invariably to select a cold, windy day, ask us to strip to our string underwear, then complain when he couldn't read the oscillations on the dial of his bathroom scale because we were shivering so hard. `Just take the extremes and average them, Will,' I suggested.

Dick Emerson deteriorated best. On the approach march his thighs had split the seams of his walking shorts; now he was fighting his own battle. It began before we reached Base Camp. Each time he went up to 2I,ooo feet his draining sinuses and parched throat would force him into a bout of coughing soon after each meal. This triggered a hyperactive gag reflex. Dick would sit at the table, nibbling wilfully at his food, commanding each bite to please stay down. Soon he would rise, walk quietly out of the tent, and shortly return to start over again without a word, perhaps by sipping some tea. One evening there was fruit cocktail for dessert. Dick looked at it and the old twinkle returned to his eyes. That ought to stay down, he thought, and as we all watched anxiously he slowly ate his own and several other servings donated to the cause. Then the twinkle faded, and he rose and left the tent again. His strength declined with his weight and he soon had to go down to Base to fatten up for the next high siege, hoping it would be with the mountain and not his stomach.

Willi and I attacked the problem of eating with a stubborn determination born of our Masherbrum experience. There I lost twenty pounds, which didn't leave much. We knew on Everest that with time our menu would grow old, so we stuffed ourselves. As long as there was food, we ate. We would neatly clean the leftovers of those whose appetites were jading, and we competed even in this. In due course we would stagger distended to our tents to sit dazed and breathless on our sleeping-bags, barely able to bend over and untie our boots. For all discomfort, however, we lost only four pounds each during the weeks preceding our final push. We explained this glibly to our companions as merely the superior acclimatization of our hardened Himalayan digestive tracts. Our doctors, Gil and Dave, suspected that no matter how much one consumed, little would be utilized. Whatever our inner mysteries, Willi and I believed that our devouring determination helped to slow the process of deterioration.

One event that invariably followed our distensive eating was the cool hour, which easily became the `cruel hour'-the few fleeting minutes each evening when we rose from our orgy, left the warmth of the mess tent, and hurried off to bed through the cold grey evening

light of the Cwm. It was then that the Why? knifed me, and thoughts of home and the warm beach at La Jolla mocked us in our icy isolation half a world away. We would stand before the sleeve entrance to our small tent, summon courage, bend down, and plunge inside. On hands and knees I poked my head through the sleeve, kicked boots together outside to dislodge the snow from the cleats. Inside, panting from the labour, we lit our candle lanterns to enjoy their psychological warmth. We shed our down parkas, wadding them for pillows or stuffing them between our sleeping-bags and air mattresses to insulate our shoulders and hips against the cold emanating from the snow below. We tucked our boots under our air mattresses to fill concavities the heat from our bodies melted in the snow beneath us. Then we slid into cold sleeping-bags. We would shiver a while, and the cruel hour was over.

Wrapped in womblike warmth, lit by the glow of our lanterns, we would lie back and accept the security and comfort of the moment. Our world was now complete within the compass of cloth walls. In a duffel at our feet were all the earthly possessions that mattered: down pants, extra goggles, socks, cleaner underwear saved for the final assault, our luxuries in the corner by our heads-candles, pills to loosen a cough or to dry a sinus or to lull a sleepless thinker, diaries and stationery, toothbrush, mirror, lotion, pictures of the people we loved, and a copy of that 1954 Mountain World that contained our only photo of the West Ridge. A drawstring bolted out the cold snowy world and there was more than comfort within.

But there were chores for those who clung to a few of the amenities. Willi, deeply engrossed in the complexities of Emerson's diary, would steel himself against the aural ordeal of my toothbrushing. Propped on an elbow, I would engineer a bit of toothpowder (paste freezes) on to my brush. Then would come the sounds of vigorous massage accompanied by exclamations about the joys of oral hygiene, all prelude to a loud gulp-the only convenient means of disposal. Besides it helped maintain precious body fluids. The final toothbrush-cleaning slurp was anticlimatic. The ordeal was over and Willi could settle back to his labours. He never brushed his teeth.

The diary was part of Dick's research into motivation and our response to everything from weather to each others' annoyances. Each book was indestructibly constructed and emblazoned with our names in gold; no matter which crevasse we might try to leave one in, a smiling Sherpa face would always appear: `You lose book, Sahib?' We were asked to pour forth our most evil thoughts and fondest hopes in an impersonalized numerical scale a computer could ultimately sink

its transistors into. Our emotions were all to lie within a range of minus 5 to plus 5. We had to appraise weather past and future, . rate each other's irritability, evaluate the climbing difficulties and dangers today and tomorrow, gauge our physical condition (weak-strong), our enthusiasm for the various routes, and estimate the chance of success. There was room for a `Decision made in the last 8 days.' True to my profession I wrote: `(i) To wait for sinusitis to resolve. (2) To take cold pills. (3) To take antibiotic. (4) To take both cold pill and antibiotics. Outcome 3.'

Chores done, we could turn to pocketbooks, or letters to wives, or talk.

`I'm afraid I violated the law today,' I told Willi. `Lester was sitting outside his tent, tanning his Freudian hide, and I happened to glance down at some papers he left out. The one on top was one Emerson had filled out, where you're asked to rate how you think others feel toward you. He's underestimating our regard for him. All he put down was an 8o.'

`He must be really feeling guilty,' Willi said. `All he's done is come up here, vomit, and head back to Base again. He must feel bad that he hasn't been able to help on the route. But gosh, he just doesn't know how we feel.'

`He's got more determination than anybody on the team and it's all used up trying to make his food stay down. I hope he doesn't come up too soon this time. Maybe if he stays till the final push, he can get up and over before he has time to start vomiting again.'

Dick's recurrent loss of fluid through vomiting could only aggravate the dehydration that is always a problem in highaltitude mountaineering. A man breathing fast and deep into cold dry air may lose a gallon of water a day. It is so hard to prime and light stoves to melt large volumes of snow to small volumes of water that great drinking orgies don't take place. Dehydration is an important cause of deterioration above 21,000 feet. Knowing this and having portable butane stoves which would light instantly, we went. to the other extreme. Moreover we had the luxury of a Sherpa cook at Advance Base. So we would down tea, soup, coffee, and Wyler's lemonade by the quart, often far exceeding the loss we could expect from a normal day's work.

For some reason, the effects of all this liquid never pressed upon us during the day when there was unlimited voiding acreage available.

However, as soon as we lay down at night, our kidneys turned on. But this was a $400,000 expedition, so we did not have to emerge from our cozy shelter into the cold world. Each of us had a sleek plastic Italian-designed urinal, personalized, which we carried faithfully wherever we went. One need not even leave his sleeping bag, or, with a bit of practice, even leave a horizontal position to use the thing. Some mastered the technique sooner than others. A few never quite got the hang of it. Still I had to give Willi credit for trying.

Willi could put down his book, blow out his candle, and within minutes vigorously concoct dreams to regale Lester with next morning. I would plod through Justine until my candle burned out, then continue in my sleeping-bag with flashlight, waiting for sleep. Finally, tired of reading, I often lay awake until early morning, climbing the Ridge a hundred times, imagining the difficulties of the first step, the problems of rope-fixing and piton-pounding on an overhang at 28,000 feet, climbing without oxygen because the difficulty was too great to allow the extra weight. My brain pored over prosaic logistics: the numbers of food boxes, oxygen bottles, carries from 4W to SW, Sherpas we could borrow from the Colers. I was obsessed with the mountain and escaped only when I could dream of Gene and our children, finally to sleep through the hours of dawn and morning tea.

My obsession worried Dick. `You'd better slow down,' he said to me one morning at Advance Base. `Your enthusiasm is so outspoken you may be threatening Willi's role as climbing leader. I think he might resent it a bit.'

`I can't believe it. Do you really think so?'

`Well, yes. For example, the radio conversations. That's part of Willi's job, talking to Norm and the others. You should stay out of it.'

`I'd never thought of it before, but I think you're right. It's my tunnel vision showing through. Even so, it's hard to believe he could be jealous or resentful. He's never said a thing.'

`Well, think about it and keep your eyes open.'

Sitting alone in the tent, I had a chance to think. In my zeal for the climb I had become so absorbed in the problems of planning and fighting for the West Ridge that I never dreamed I might be pressing Willi. He was our climbing leader. Should we ever not agree, then the decision would be his. He had an understanding and insight that I

envied. He could talk with Norm and the others at times when my outspoken responses irked them. Yet the thought of not being natural, of now being at all servile, seemed quite wrong. In my usual, subtle manner, I could find no solution but to just point-blank ask him how he felt.

That night, filling out my diary, I reached the blank for `Decisions made in the last 8 days.' All right. Now.

`Willi, do you resent my talking on the radio when it's supposed to be your job as climbing leader?'

`What? Where did you get that idea?'

`Well, Dick thought I might be stepping on your toes as leader. He thought you might resent it. Do you?'

`Well, son, as long as you remember who's the leader of this affair, go ahead and talk on the radio all you want.'

`No, seriously, you baboon, how do you feel?'

`Well, I'll tell you. As they said, you're a fanatic. With you around, I don't figure I have to worry about all the things my old guide's instinct has had me doing for years. Even when I'm asleep, I can hear you lying awake over there at night, with the gears grinding out new ideas. I figure all I've got to do is wake up in the morning to the deluge, filter out what sounds good, and keep you from starting a civil war with the Colers. And just keep the old Unsoeld talents ready when you finally crack.'

`I don't know whether to say thanks or not. Anyway, I'm relieved. But don't hold your breath till I crack. At your age, you'll never make it.'

The conversation degenerated. I decided not to talk on the radio again when Willi was available. Instead I devoted our evening hours to brainwashing him. Only when it looked as if our effort was threatened by expedition politics did I ever forget my vow.

It soon became apparent to me that the Colers had miscalculated how much equipment the four-man summit teams would need. Instead of a week or ten days to stock the South Col, it would be closer to twice that. Even with luck the earliest they could reach the summit was the end of April.

Hope for the survival of our West Ridge effort thus depended, in the absence of Sherpas, on an untried system; the battle of the winch was begun of necessity. But would the engine run at these altitudes? Could we find suitable terrain -long snow slopes free from crevasses and cliffs in the fall line, and having adequate terminals? The route to the Shoulder did not fit the description. It climbed up-Cwm over scree and icefall, then descended a couple of hundred feet past the Old Dump, turned a steep corner to the New Dump, and finally climbed steeply to the skyline crest below Camp 3W. Only here did the prospect for hauling seem hopeful. Our supplies would be lashed to a sled formed from three pairs of short skis held together at each end by a metal crossbar. A thin steel line led to the tiny winch, anchored out of sight above. With an exotic mixture of rocket fuels blended especially for the altitude, the 16-pound engine was supposed to drag 500 pounds uphill at 5 feet per minute. In our naive anticipation the rig seemed simple, but we soon saw that out team sorely lacked rapport with it. The day Barry Prather came up from Base, we thought we had our solution, a man who could make a motor run. Unfortunately, the South Colers got him first. He joined Dingman to make the Lhotse Summit team-while we wondered what had happened to the plan that the West Ridge would come second only to the Col.

Al Auten came to our rescue. As communications officer, he had seemed indispensably wed to the short-wave radio at Base; however, when we asked Norman if Noddy or Maynard Miller could be trained to take over the radio, Al was agreeable. Forlorn though our effort might be, he was glad to escape the nightly exchange with Kathmandu for a chance to climb. We became a team of five, and he and Barry headed up to the Shoulder to establish a winch station below 3W and string cable down to the New Dump.

The next day, in a blizzard, they huddled over the motor trying to make it start. Fine snow filled the carburetor and diluted the fuel. The starter broke. When they retreated to the tent to attempt repairs and had the housing off, the starter spring suddenly uncoiled across the tent. They stuffed it back in. The engine would occasionally gasp, splutter, or sigh, and a quantity of nuts, bolts, and springs had no place to go when it came time to reassemble things.

So on April ig Willi and I headed up with a new motor. Willi carried his trusty old Kelty pack frame, and I experimented with a new fibreglass wrap-around model. Encased by the pack and an excess of down clothing, I felt secure against the cold, but before we had travelled two hundred yards I was bathed in sweat from ankles to neck, while my toes, fingers and forehead felt leadenly frozen. Wind

blasted my face and accentuated the contrast. With each step I fought to expand my lungs within my rigid shell. When Willi paused, I complained of his gruelling pace, then collapsed panting, freezing, and sweating in various parts, as he delivered the final taunt:

`You better head down to Base for some rest tomorrow. You're not quite up to keeping up with the Old Man yet.'

If I can just make it to the Old Dump, I told myself. Willi ploughed ahead, the rope taut between us. Maybe he's right, I thought; maybe I do need to go down. When it looked most as if I would never get there, Willi made his mistake.

`Let me take your pack; you can take my Kelty.'

`No,' I said, `yours is just as heavy. It won't do any good. It's just not my day.'

`Well, let me try carrying that monster anyway. I'm curious.

We traded and I took the lead. My torso began to cool, my nose to warm. and my breathing to be easier, now that I was free of the Iron Maiden. The rope came taut behind as I pushed to the edge of exhaustion, hoping I wasn't holding us up too much. Up the fixed rope we went, not pausing, over the crest, down to the tents at the Dump.

`Where in the world were you going in such a rush?' Willi asked.

`I was just trying to keep you off my heels. Wasn't that why you put me in the lead?'

`Well, you taxed the Old Guide a bit. Just goes to show you the virtues of a good pack.'

Barry and Al met us at the New New Dump for lunch. Though discouraged, they were determined to make the damned winch go. They headed back up with their new supplies. Four days later they came down, the machine still master. Willi and Dick took the next shift, then Barry replaced Willi. The hand winch was installed at the New New Dump, cable was strung diagonally down the slope, and the sled piled high with oxygen bottles. Cranking began: thirty seconds, forty-five, and that was all we could do. Even Tashi and Nima Tenzing couldn't crank much longer. Slowly the stretch came out of the cable, then the sled broke loose and inched up. A foot, two feet, three, and stop. More cranking, more stretch, and up it jerked again.

Dick used his ice-axe as a snatch block to change the direction of the cable so as to keep the sled from drifting across the slope toward a large crevasse. The axe broke loose, soaring across the face to impale itself in the snow a hundred feet away As Dick watched helplessly, the sled rolled sideways, pen- duluming across the slope into the crevasse. Out of sight above, Barry and the two Sherpas kept cranking, unaware that the sled, with its treasure of oxygen bottles, spun slowly in space. Slowly the sled rose to the lip of the crevasse, arced over the edge, and disappeared above.

Once both sleds reached the New New Dump, hand winching ended. With Nima Tenzing sick, the effort became impossible. Another round with the motor was only briefly successful. One sled now hung five hundred feet below the ridge crest, visible from Advance Base as a black speck. Finally, the afternoon snows buried it, and it took more than a day to find it again. The idea of our having misplaced three hundred pounds of oxygen bottles seemed ridiculous to those of us watching from below. Mechanical ineptitude and a growing anti-winch bias prevented my helping. I could imagine an oxygen-laden sled plunging spectacularly Cwmward, our hopes for the West Ridge riding with it. With each near disaster my conservatism deepened. We had better not tempt Everest's gods. It would be so much safer to go the old-fashioned way and carry the loads.

The day finally came when the motor, guided by the steely hand of Auten, was made to run and finish the hauling. In the end we may have saved a day or two and at the least the winch provided good group therapy. In the words of Barry Corbet: `Never has so little been accomplished by so many.

A little manpower would obviously be better. According ly, at Advance Base I was always on the prowl for any loose Sherpas to ferry loads to our Dump. An occasional sick castoff from the Col, and Mingma, our eager untalented cook, could be coerced into carrying a couple of food boxes the two-hour journey up. Slowly, we acquired Sherpas, sometimes having as many as three or four. On April 25, unescorted Sherpas were turned around on the Col route by the weather. This was a crucial carry, the most demanding of the entire route; thirty-eight loads in all had to be carried from 25,000 feet to the Col without use of oxygen.

The morning of April 26 a steady snowfall added to the South Coler's depression from the failure of the day before. We had been at 21,000 feet for almost a month. Four days earlier, Willi had proposed that some of us should descend to Base for rest and to slow down the

drain on high-camp food, which seemed to disappear as fast as it arrived, leaving too little to stock the higher camps. The idea was vetoed, since deterioration was not evident and everyone claimed he was feeling fine. But on the 26th, growing impatient to be on with it, and realizing that we couldn't stay so high and healthy indefinitely, we held another critical meeting:

`If I had known some members of this expedition were going to be so fanatical about the West Ridge ...' Norman began. He reminded us that the West Ridge had been his dream too, long ago. But now a carry had failed and time had been lost; our strength was supposedly declining with the long stay up high.

`There's no question we're deteriorating,' Will Siri said. `One more day just sitting and we may be too far gone for the final push. Remember, it's five more days from here to the summit, living higher every day. Tomorrow, we either have to start the final assault or all go down to recuperate.'

`But, Will,' I piped up, `four days ago you said there was no sign of deterioration. How can it have suddenly progressed so far that one more day makes such a big difference?'

`Be quiet, Tom,' Willi said. And I was, feeling certain he would rise articulately to the occasion, for we both knew what was coming. Twenty-one loads still had to be carried to the Col. If the assault were to begin tomorrow, this would require all the Sherpas available. The West Ridge would have to wait.

Norm made the final decision: `If the weather's good tomorrow, we'll start the final push. If not, we'll go down to rest.'

The meeting was over, we were overruled, and Willi hadn't said a thing. But what was there to say?

We rehashed the meeting with Dick, who had come up to Advance Base that afternoon for the third time, arriving two hours too late to join the battle. Though the West Ridge was at a standstill, the setback didn't seem too serious considering the time remaining. We did have an obligation to climb the mountain and the Col route offered the best chance of success. I could understand the South Coler's feelings. Inactivity had led to impatience, a brief storm to pessimism, and the loss of time to fear of failure. Still, we had a full month's lead on any previous expedition, so the decision seemed downright premature. I could understand, but I couldn't agree. The thing that bit deepest was

the realization that, outside our nucleus of five, there seemed to be no enthusiasm for the West Ridge. Our dream was now to be disregarded ; views expressed and decisions made in the detachment of the approach march were now being modified, and I could see no reason why. What puzzled me most was Willi's silence. Why hadn't he spoken up? Usually we complemented each other, I outspoken in defence of the Ridge, he tactfully pacifying, though no less motivated. If he sometimes felt my responses were too extreme, I now thought his far too passive. Perhaps we drove each other deeper into our own patterns in an effort to compensate for the deficit each thought he saw in the other.

April 27 was immaculately clear, the sky blue-black, and the plume for once missing from Everest. Shortly after lunch, Big Jim, Norman, Gombu, and Ang Dawa set out with thirteen Sherpas. I felt the excitement of the movement. The end of their journey lay eight thousand feet above and only five days away if the weather held. I felt envy, pride, admiration, and hope that they would pull it off. There was something missing when they left.

A day later Lute, Barrel, Dick Pownall, and Girme Dorje headed up. I ran the movie camera to immortalize their departure. The next day, I took Barry to trade off with Willi on the winch. Even with a load we made excellent time. Willi, too, was effusive in describing his feat of step-cutting across the fixed ropes-with sixty-five pounds on his back. For us, at least, acclimatization was still a jump ahead of deterioration. With Dave, Barry Prather, and the last Sherpas headed toward the Col, Advance Base was a ghost town that night, and we were no closer to our destination than we had been weeks before.

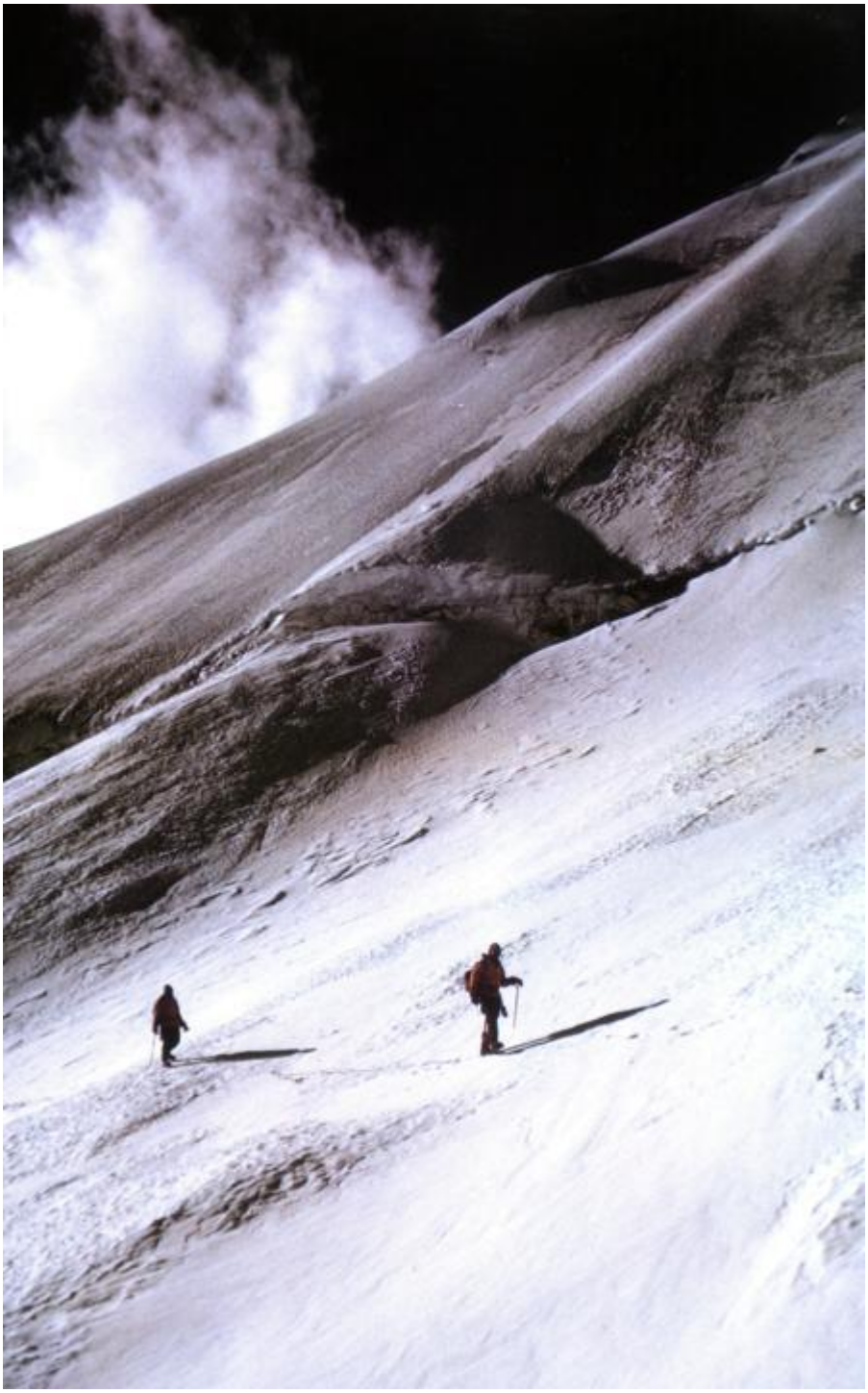
On the 3oth, as the final assault team moved up to their final camp, Willi and I headed toward Base for some unneeded recuperation. Going down was a journey of little pleasure and of mixed emotions. We had been relentlessly pushing for weeks, both on the mountain and in the battles to keep the effort alive. Now, on the day before the final assault by the Col, we found ourselves headed in the opposite direction, carrying us farther from our goal. It reminded me of a Monopoly game, where you suddenly land on a square that says, `Go back to Go' and you start over. We walked into base that afternoon. The summit of Everest towered eleven thousand feet above our heads, just as it had when we first arrived six weeks before.

MA YNARD MILLER: Advanced Base, Camp 2

BARRY BISHOP: Oxygen lessons, teacher Hornbein

ALLEN AUTEN: Emerson trimming Corbet

WILLI UNSOELD: Near Dump Camp on West Shoulder



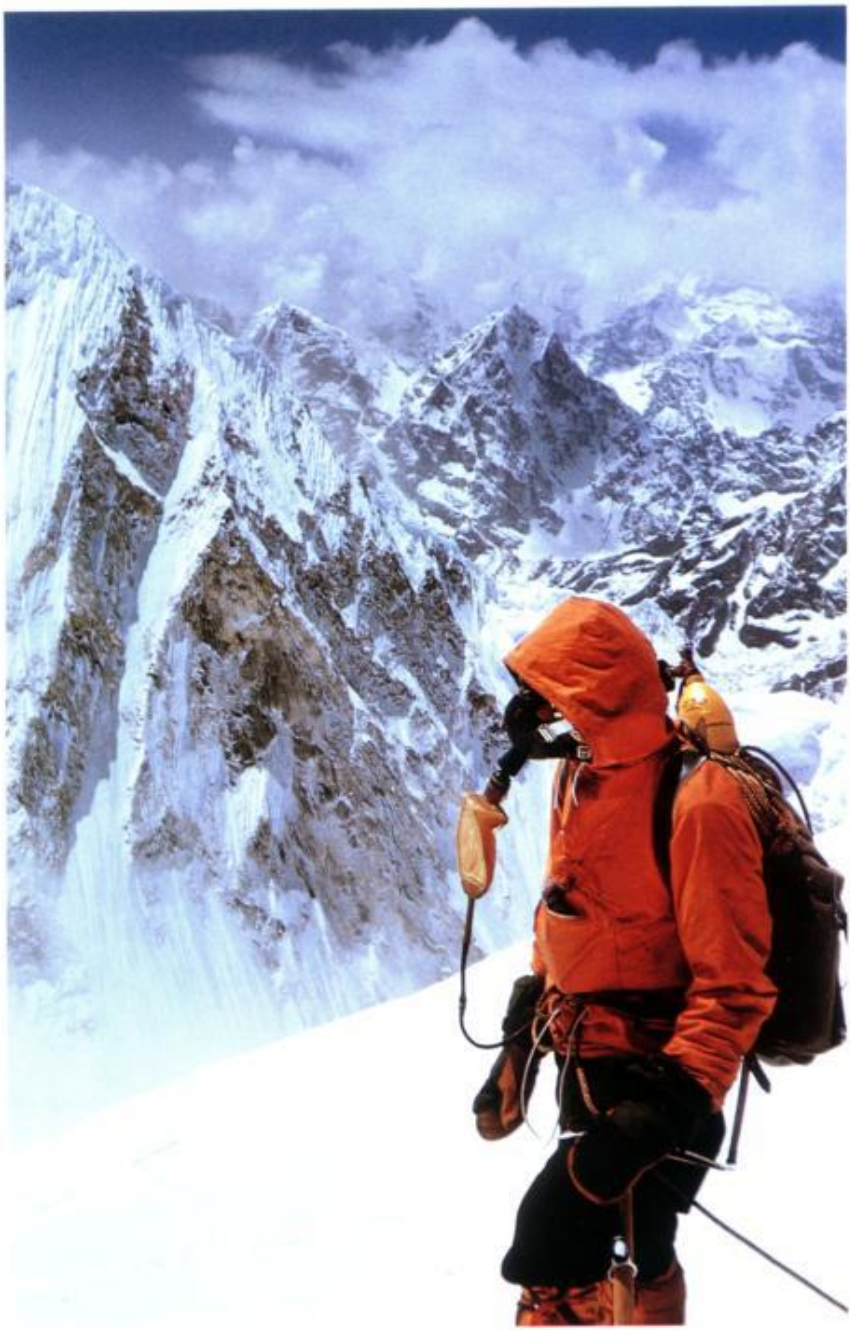
THOMAS HORNBEIN: Prayer flags, Unsoeld and Everest

NORMAN DYHRFNFURTH: West Shoulder from Camp 3 on the Lhotse Face

I am being driven forward Into an unknown land. The pass grows steeper, The air colder and sharper. A wind from my unknown goal Stirs the strings Of expectation.

Still the question: Shall I ever get there? There where life resounds, A clear pure note In the silence.

-DAG HAMMARSKJOLD



WILLI UNSOELD: An oxygen-masked Hornbein on the West Shoulder

WILLI UNSOELD: Looking back down the West Shoulder

THOMAS HORNBEIN: Unsoeld and Bishop at Camp 4W promontory; Nuptse behind

WILLI UNSOELD: Tibet from Camp 4W

WILLI UNSOELD: Sundown on the Lhotse Face from Camp 4W

WILLI UNSOELD: High wind over Everest summit

WILLI UNSOELD: Blowing climbers and remains of Camp 4W

I believe that no man can be completely able to summon all his strength, all his will, all his energy, for the last desperate move, till he is convinced the last bridge is down behind him and there is nowhere to go but on.

- HEINRICH HARRER

1 i . Our Turn

May i. Fresh eggs, chicken, even a can of beer that had somehow escaped prior consumption, then a bucket of warm water for a piecemeal bath in the morning sunshine, followed by clean underwear and socks after a month-it all took a bit of the edge off our regrets at coming down. It was a relief for me-and for Willi too, I suspect-to escape for a few days from my nervous energy.

The morning was warm and sunny, but streamers of snow blew like prayer flags off the crest of Nuptse, carrying far out across the Cwm. Could they even move under such conditions? The whole battle seemed remote, unreal, unimportant. Here in the shelter of towering peaks, where weeks before all had been frozen, water coursed in rivulets over the surface of the Glacier. Base Camp looked well worn and lived in. The red tents seemed a permanent part of the moraine. Paths had been cleared and lined with rocks. A stone-sided, tarproofed kitchen had been constructed; inside, box shelves were half-filled with long-forgotten delicacies too heavy to be carried farther up the mountain. There were chairs to lounge in and a slightly sagging table to write on and eat from. There was no use fighting it.

We busied ourselves with chores. I sharpened my axe, made new bindings for my crampons, read From Russia with Love. We weighed in on Siri's scale; at 131 pounds I was only four below normal, even with the dirt washed off. Willi had lost about the same. Perhaps our eating habits were paying off.

From Camp 4 on the Lhotse Face, Dingman reported high winds and no sign of movement above. Prather, he informed us, had had breathing trouble during the night, possibly pulmonary oedema. Dave had given him digitalis and some oxygen the Sherpas had uncovered outside the tent. He was better today, but weak.

At 3 p.m. on May 2, the eight Sherpas who had carried the high camp reached Base. They were tired. `Camp 6 very high, Sahib,' Nawang Dorje reported proudly, but that would not matter if the wind had kept them pinned down all day. An hour later the radio squawked to life with Gil's voice from Advance Base.

Gil (Advance Base) : The clouds have lifted up here and we see nine climbers descending from above the Yellow Band and an additional three between Camps 4 and 3. Don't yet know what all this means-whether they have been successful or are retreating.

Our conversation with Kathmandu at 5.00 that evening found Bill Gresham's radio shack packed in tense anticipation.

`No word,' was all Al Auten could offer to Jim Ullman. But ten minutes after we signed off, the Base set came to life.

Roberts: 2 to Base. 2 to Base. Come in Base!

Auten: This is Base. Go ahead 2.

Roberts: Three people are down. The Big One and the Small One made the top! Over.

Auten: Hallelujah ! What news!

Then, recovering his usual radio calm, Al said, `Sure. Whittaker and Gombu, we're assuming. Is that correct? Over.'

Roberts: It is Roger, but not for release, not for release. Over.

They'd made it. In spite of the winds, they'd made it! Willi and I hugged each other with a feeling of relief. Reliefand pleasure, too-at their success. Jim and Gombu had given us our chance to try the West- Ridge. But we couldn't completely share the elation of our companions. For us it was premature; we had scarcely begun. I wrote that evening, `I envy Whittaker only in having his effort behind him, while ours is solidly, challengingly before us.'

Nawang Dorje came to ask for fuel for celebration. Will gave him a bottle of Scotch, which Nawang accepted with a mischievous grin. Though the Sherpas appeared less excited about the success than we, they weren't going to pass up an excuse for a party. Will and Maynard felt like celebrating too and Noddy joined them. After a while, Willi and I headed for bed. A tremendous weight had been lifted. As we lay in our bags, thinking of the future, we could hear Maynard talking in the mess tent, fifty feet away.

`Now that the mountain is climbed we've got to put our major effort into research,' he said. Will's softer reply was lost in the night breeze. Willi and I were suddenly alert. We turned around on our air mattresses and slid our heads out the vestibule of the tent. The lantern on the table in the mess tent cast silhouettes of the tent's three occupants on its red-orange wall. We watched and listened attentively, picking up only tantalizing snatches of conversation.

Our effort was more wonderfully rewarded by the beauty of the

night. It was alive with sound-the roar of remote wind off high ridges, water trickling in tiny rivulets over the surface of the glacier, the deep settling whoompf which said the glacier had moved. Moonlight touched the half-imagined walls of Nuptse, and reflected brilliantly from the manyfacets of neve penitentes on the glacier below. My thoughts wandered upward from the crumbled chaos of the Khumbu Glacier, past the West Shoulder-home.

Days passed as Willi and I lazily fattened. The afternoon of May S, we went to our tent, bored and impatient, and Ito my diary:

`Weather was too poor for Norman to come from Advance Base yesterday, so we expect him down this p.m. Now we can have at the West Ridge in earnest, but with not much time remaining.

`To add to the excitement and to our difficulties, yesterday four Sherpas cooking tea in the tents at the Dump were suddenly accosted by a powder-snow avalanche. It carried them several hundred feet downhill, rolling them up in the tents, and providing a nice ride down. Their axes, crampons, and ropes, sitting outside, were lost. They came down to Advance Base without them, but able to laugh at the whole episode. Fortunately almost all our supplies were at the New Dump and hopefully are unscathed. All four kept their good humour as they descended to Base Camp for rest, but only Passang Tendi volunteered to go up on the West Ridge again.

About mid-afternoon a buzz of excited voices brought us out of the tent. Several figures moved slowly toward Camp. In front Dingman travelled with weary resignation. Norman's Sherpa, Ang Dawa, still moved like a lithe spider monkey; but Norman came slowly, each slightly-widebased step taken with the painful deliberation of a man almost drained dry. He appeared more than just tired; he had aged considerably.

Within an hour of his arrival we were all gathered at the table in the mess tent. There were things to be discussed and, with a strange urgency, Norm wanted to discuss them now. Should we release the names of the summit team? No, we had decided during the approach march to avoid or try to avoid making a hero of the first American in such a team effort; we'd wait until all attempts had been completed. But now, Will Siri pointed out, the Sherpas could not be held to this strange pact, and word would leak back to Kathmandu within a few days. Dingman agreed. Big Jim agreed too; he felt that all publicity would be good for the Expedition. The majority voted to wait.

Norm was impatient to move on. His lined, windblasted face showed fatigue. His eyes, set deep, seemed empty, as if he had gone some place and had not completely returned.

He began as he had ten days before at Advance Base: `If I had known Tom was going to be so fanatical about the West Ridge,' he said, and this time he finished the thought, `I would have increased our budget, ordered three hundred oxygen bottles, and hired fifty Sherpas. If only Tom had been honest with me about his ambitions back in the States.'

`I'm sorry, Norm, I guess I wasn't aware of my own ambitions back then,' I replied, puzzled.

The Maytag oxygen mask worked wonderfully, he said, but the plastic sleeping masks were unbearable. The main mistake, he felt, was insufficient oxygen; not nearly enough had been allotted for two four-man ascents of Everest, plus Lhotse. By implication, too much had been assigned to the West Ridge. Willi, sitting beside me, placed a hand gently on my shoulder, anticipating a volatile rebuttal. I remained silent, waiting.

Norm described the extreme breathlessness of just sitting inside the tent at 27,000 feet. The oxygen left in his climbing bottle helped. When it was gone, anxiety and air hunger returned. Another bottle was started. Perhaps there was logic in its continued use considering what they would be called upon to do the following day. Regardless, Norm needed it; the others would benefit by it also. During their two nights at Camp 6 almost all the eighteen bottles carried there were consumed. Six had been meant for the second assault.

Basing our oxygen needs on the experience of the British and the Swiss Expeditions, I had not reckoned on a supply of `sitting' oxygen. If we used it only for climbing and sleeping, there was more than enough oxygen for all our objectives. Now, Norm raised the question : Was this adequate? He had been higher than most of us, and could speak with an authority that even the Masherbrum group didn't have. He needed more oxygen; the rest of us might too.

Norm, at 45, had climbed higher than any man his age. To film the summit climb he and Ang Dawa, burdened with cameras, had gone above 28,ooo feet before their oxygen ran low. As he talked, I began to realize that he had travelled to the edge of physical limits-oxygen almost had led him beyond. He was exhausted, possibly disappointed, perhaps suffering the lingering effects of oxygen lack, and his restraint

was gone. His feelings poured forth. There was nothing to say in reply, in my own defence; there was no need. I turned and looked at Willi's hand on my shoulder, then at Willi, and the hand relaxed.

A discussion of the future followed. For once the West Ridge was free of attack. Lute and Barry were eager for another chance, so it was decided they would wait at Base until the West Ridge team was in position, then move up, hopefully to reach the summit by the Col the same day we came up the West Ridge, Unfortunately, with ten men having gone as high as the South Col, about seventy-five of the ninety-five bottles of oxygen were consumed to get only two men to the top; just enough remained to permit one two-man assault by the Col, with a two-man support. It was our turn now; all we had to do was climb the mountain.

The next morning we sat in the sunshine sorting gear and chatting with Jimmy Roberts about our Sherpa requirements. Perhaps our lack of haste was a reluctance to surrender the security of Base Camp for the physical and emotional effort we knew waited above. Leaving an hour late, we headed for the sun-baked oven of the Icefall. Almost with the first steps onto the ice our mood changed to one of pleasure at moving our legs, climbing, panting, sweating, coming alive again. The pleasure was heightened by our feeling of pleasant finality at heading up for the last time. No matter what happened in the next two weeks, the effort would soon be over. Life could take on a new direction.

We dragged into Advance Base in time for supper. Al was there with Dick and Barry, who had descended in forlorn frustration from another round with the winch. After supper we had problems to solve.

`Where are you going to house the Sherpas?' Barry asked.

`At the Dump,' Willi replied.

`You're kidding,' Dick said.

`No, why should I be kidding? That was just a surface slide that swept the camp away.'

`It's nothing to gamble with,' said Gil.

Dick agreed. `It was a continuous small surface slide that could have killed them.'

`It's only a veneer about five inches thick,' I said. `That's all that's

going to come off that slope any time, Dick.'

`Now, just a minute, Tom; a very small percentage of the slope that could come did come. What kept the rest of it up there I don't know, but the very small section that did come completely buried the tent. It didn't just roll over it, it consumed it.'

`How far down the hill is the tent?' I asked.

`I'm not sure,' Dick answered. `The one that was buried, I don't think ever moved. Those guys were very unlucky to get hit with a slide, but given that they were going to get hit they were just damnably lucky, just extremely lucky.'

`But this is always the case, Dick; you're lucky if you get out of it, and unlucky if you don't,' I said.

`That's right,' Gil said. `But I don't care to play Russian roulette.'

Barry interrupted. `Anybody have a spoon they're not using?' Auten licked his off and passed it over to Barry, who thanked him.

`I think the ideal thing is to try relocating the camp,' I said. `Try to put it on a rise instead of in a groove and it ought to be 98 or 99 per cent safe.'

`Maybe,' Dick conceded. `You've got to do some careful calculating on that whole area to find such a spot. You've got a potential avalanche slope above everything.'

This did seem to be true. Gil ended the discussion:

`Whether you yourself are willing to camp there or not has nothing to do with it,' he said. `The way I look at it, if you're going to use Sherpas, you're obligated to take care of them and protect them. And the way to protect them is not to put them in a camp at the bottom of an avalanche slope.'

Willi didn't quite concede; he just changed the subject. But had he really believed what he was saying, or was he only debating?

Starting on a new tack, he said: `We've got to carry those two lousy winches on up to try them again. Obviously, Al's the guy who's got to do it, because he has the know-how to make them work.' Looking at me, he added, `And obviously one of us two has to go up also.'

`Why, obviously?' Dick asked.

`Because you guys are on R. and R., that's why,' Willi answered. `You're run down and recuperating. And since Hornbein is under the weather ...'

`I'm not under the weather.'

Just barely made it up here,' Willi said.

`You had to run the corners, Unsoeld. We made it up in two and a half hours, almost a record.'

`Just as long as you two compete with each other, I don't give a damn,' Dick said.

Two days later, Willi and Al headed up with two spare winch motors and ether to prime them. They were determined to make them work. Eight Sherpas went up with them to carry the remainder of our supplies from the New Dump to Camp 3W. They would stay at 3W and descend each day to pick up loads.

The next three days were immaculate summit days, alas, with us nowhere near our destination and looking up eight thousand feet at that which had hung out of reach so long. One night we watched the full moon rise over the summit of Lhotse. Long before it appeared, the slopes above shone white as the shadow of Lhotse crept downward across the face of Everest. Ridges and flutings blocked the light, leaving swaths of impenetrable darkness in their lee. Night retreated up-Cwm before the steadily advancing light, and in its wake black slits of crevasses scored the gently rolling whiteness. Lhotse's skyline began to glow, caught fire from the eerie light, then disgorged a thin edge of unbelievable brightness. The moon burst from behind the mountain, taking possesion of the knoll on which Dick and I stood. Bathed by light devoid of warmth, we shivered, reluctant to surrender the moment for the comfort of our beds. Undulating terraces of the Lhotse Glacier mirrored the brilliance of the moon. Fear lurked in the shadows, memory stirred.

Such weather couldn't last. On May 9 it snowed hard. Mindful of the avalanche hazard below 3W, we stayed put. The major consequence of the lost day became apparent at the radio contact with Base the following afternoon :

Advance Base (Gil Roberts): The feeling up here is that Bishop and Lute should postpone coming up by a day because the West Ridge is

running a day behind and Lester wants to shrink them before they leave. Over.

Base (Prather) : They're looking for a summit date of the i8th, possibly the i9th. They can't delay any more. When is the West Ridge planning a summit attempt? Over.

Advance Base (Roberts) : The loth.

Base (Prather) : That's too late, and too bad! Barrel and Lute are going to just about have to go up tomorrow. Over.

Advance Base (Roberts) : This means that they won't form any support for the West Ridge Party and people are wondering why!

Base (Prather): The porters are coming in on the 21st and we're leaving Base Camp on the 22nd. Over.

Advance Base (Roberts) : Basically, I'm not in the mood to get into the argument, because I don't really give a damn about it. Why don't you talk to Hornbein. Over.

Base (Prather) : They just say they're coming up tomorrow. Over.

Advance Base (Hornbein) : The only conditions under which we can hit the summit on the 19th or loth are if we do not lose any more days because of weather. In other words, perfect conditions. Is this clear?

Base (Prather) : Roger, Roger. Gotcha. It's just that time is running out. Over.

Advance Base (Hornbein) : May I talk to Norman, please?

Base (Prather) : Roger, he's listening. [Norman, with laryngitis, couldn't talk.] Go ahead.

Advance Base (Hornbein): O.K., we realize time is running out but we envisioned that there were a few more days beyond the loth or 21st, so far as summit attempts by our route are concerned. And even though this might retard at least part of the exodus from Base Camp, we would hope that we could pursue our attempt beyond the loth or 22nd of May. How do you read that? Over.

Base (Prather) : Only comment is, there are 300 porters coming in here on the 21st. Over.

Advance Base (Hornbein) : Well, I guess we'll see you in Kathmandu

then. Are we going to have any support for our traverse if we happen to get that far and it happens to be later than the 20th of May? Over.

Base (Barry Bishop) : Tom, do you read me? Over.

Advance Base (Hornbein) : Yes, I do, Barrel. Fire away.

Base (Bishop) : Righto. Lute and I will delay another day, so that the first possibility of our hitting the summit will be the 19th and, if weather closes in, we may be able to give her a go on the loth. But I think that's about it. How does that tie in with you, Tom?

Advance Base (Hornbein) : As long as the weather is this good, fine. We lost yesterday because of tremendous snowfall and a fantastic avalanche hazard up there. We'll expectto see you here one day later. I would drop one other thought, though, that you consider leaving us a small nest egg if you really have to pull out on the 22nd. In case we get out a little later than that, we can move out behind you and perhaps catch up. Over.

Base (Prather): Roger. We hope this doesn't happen, though.

I could understand Lute's and Barry's impatience. The longer they waited in order to synchronize with us the more they jeopardized their own summit opportunity. But if we chose to, or were forced by difficulties on the West Ridge to traverse the mountain and descend to the South Col, their presence would add greatly to our safety. Once again the question, what priority did the West Ridge have in the scheme of things? Why, now that the Col route was climbed, wasn't the decision made to wholeheartedly support our effort? Wasn't it our turn now?

On the following morning, the conversation resumed:

Base (Prather) : Lute and Barrel don't want to delay too long. However, on the brighter side, we're going to delay leaving until the 25th. So go get her! Over.

Advance Base (Hornbein) : Very good, Balu! We greatly appreciate the 25th.

Base (Dingman) : One other thing, Tom. We're wondering, because of the oxygen situation on the Col, about the possibility of deciding now that the traverse is unfeasible. Do you read? Over.

Advance Base (Hornbein) : I don't think we can make that decision,

Dave. It's going to end up being a climbing decision, I suspect. If we can possibly traverse it might be the easiest way down. Over.

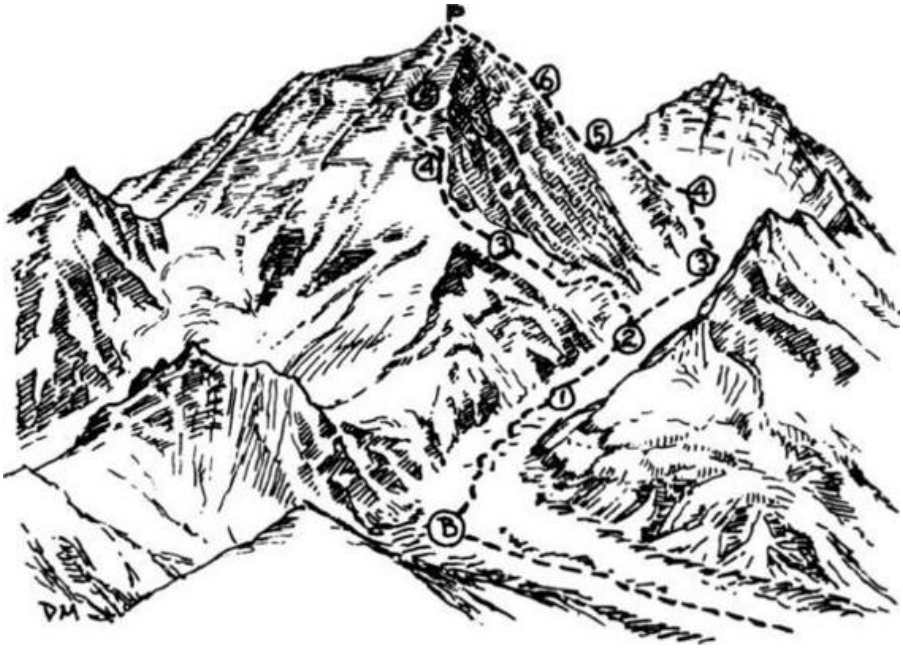
Base (Dingman) : Roger, Tom. But you don't want to go over with no one in the Col.

Advance Base (Hornbein) : I think that will depend on how hard it is getting down the other way. If there is no support, if at all possible, we would prefer to go down the way we came up, but I don't know that we can really answer this until we see how things work out.

The i i th was another lost day. The summit of Everest was capped by a seething black lenticular cloud. Rainbows flashed along its edge. The roar of wind against rock filled the Cwm. I sensed the uncontained power I could not see.

On May 12 I wrote: `Damn! We're falling behind, mostly discouraged with weather and lack of progress. This a.m., Norm, laryngitic-voiced, came on the radio to reaffirm the plan. Bishop and Lute could not wait for the summit beyond the zist. Lute, Bishop, and Jim Whittaker all took the air to induce us not to try the traverse-too hazardous to descend a route unknown to us. Norm closed with heartiest good wishes for the success of our great and desperate undertaking, making me feel all warm inside. Eight more days could see us through. Whatever the outcome, for me the whole wealth of the Expedition, or much of it anyway, lies ahead. Without this prospect the affair to now would seem mighty unsatisfying and not a little sour-but horribly educational.

`Tomorrow, I'm up to 3W. Next day, to 4W, the following, a recon to 5W, and then we are moving.'



Sketch from the American Alpine Journal, 1964

12. A Blusterous Day

May 13 was a day for celebration. Thirty long frustrating days after our descent from the Reconnaissance, Camp 3W was finally stocked. I accompanied Willi and the last load of oxygen bottles up the slope late that afternoon as Al, not visible above, reigned supreme over the winch motor, nursing, begging, coercing. His virtuosity kept the motor running till this last load of eighteen bottles was hauled over the final edge. From a single tent the camp had grown to five four-man structures, housing a record population that night-fifteen Sherpas and three Sahibs. I was weary after the long haul up from Advance Base. but my communication to my diary was expectant: '3W again, at last!'

We had enough carrying power to afford some attrition, but not much. The Sherpas were tired. Many had carried to the South Col twice and several had been to Camp 6. Whether they were physically drained or whether they figured that now the mountain was climbed it was foolish to ask for more trouble, I don't know. Phu Dorje and Dawa Tenzing, two of the strong men on the Col route, turned back from the carry that Willi took to 4W. Before their lack of enthusiasm could infect the others, I sent them on down to Advance Base. Illness and inertia ran rampant, but were cured in part by Jimmy Roberts' voice over the radio promising extra pay: each carry beyond 3W would count on the wage scale as one camp higher than on the Col route. Our progress held to schedule.

On the afternoon of May 15, Willi and I moved up to 4W. We were alone with the grandeur that had captivated us that magical afternoon a month before. Wanting to shout my elation to those below I climbed on to the rock promontory, walkie-talkie in one hand and signal mirror in the other. I lay down on my belly at the edge of the precipice and tried to arouse someone at Advance Base, four thousand feet below. No one was outside. I waited a few minutes, then scooted gingerly back from the edge and returned to the tent. Its orange-yellow radiance in the afternoon sun was in garish contrast to the brown of barren hills rolling enigmatically onward beyond the North Col. Certainly there was no more .fantastic place on the entire mountain, and it belonged to us!

But we were only guests, and the mountain proceeded to remind us of it, but with humour. It was 9 p.m. and diaries were finished. Tomorrow's water, two quarts of it, was melting on the stove as we prepared for an early start. Now, where did my plastic oxygen mask

go? I groped through the innards of my sleeping-bag; no mask. I emerged for my flashlight, then dove back in again. The glimmer of light penetrating the down bag caught Willi's attention.

`What are you doing in there?'

`Hunting for my mask. Had it in my hand a minute ago.'

`Maybe it's under your bag.'

Emerging, I turned on my knees and looked under the bag. No mask. Along the edge of the tent, under my air mattressstill no mask.

`Maybe it's in your bag, Willi. Take a look, will you?'

`How could it get in mine?'

`I don't know, but it's got to be somewhere.' My exploratory gymnastics were becoming violent.

`Watch the water, Tom!'

I did-as my air mattress flipped the two quarts, won so hard, cleanly off the stove and sent them coursing down the groove between our air mattresses.

`What's that on your bag, Tom, behind you?'

There, innocently, lay my mask. I stared chagrined. This was too much. I wasn't about to begin melting more water tonight. Worry about that tomorrow. Since we were well above the high tide of what had spilled, it could darn well wait till morning too. When it froze we could pick it up and throw it out. I put on my sleeping mask, turning the regulator to one litre per minute.

`Night, Tom. You seem to be cracking under the strain. Maybe you'd better go down tomorrow.'

`Drop dead, Unsoeld. Goodnight.'

The next day was windy, not the sort on which you'd want to wander far from home, especially without water. Lethargically we melted more, and scraping up the frozen remainder of last night's catastrophe, tossed it out the door. By noon our reluctance to join the wind outside succumbed to boredom within. We decided to go as far as the Diagonal Ditch for a possible view across the North Face.

Unfortunately, from the top of the Ditch we couldn't see a thing.

`Let's go around one more corner,' Willi said.

Curiosity and the deceptive foreshortening of distance on this vast face lured us on to unintentional fulfillment of our original plan. At 3.30 we sat down on the limestone slabs at the bottom of Hornbein's Couloir. Here, at the anticipated site of our next to last camp, the altimeter read 26,250 feet, a shade higher than the South Col. Above us the snow gully cut steeply up into the heart of the mountain, clear sailing for at least five hundred feet, then a slight bend obscured the view. Wind sent clouds of snow scurrying down the gully and momentarily blotted even the foreground from sight. Our traverse had been steep at times on rotten wind-slabbed snow. Crampons scraped across down-sloping shingles of limestone. I felt haunted by history and thoughts of Mallory. Might we be near the point where he had walked? Where is he now?

Suspense lightly seasoned the journey back. Snow carried by the rising wind had obliterated our tracks and now limited our visibility to scarcely a rope-length. On this slanting expanse it would be easy to become confused. But luck and an instinctive feeling for terrain acquired over many years of climbing homed us in on the rock castle that marked the top of the Diagonal Ditch. We reached 4W at 6 p.m., along with a lot more wind. During our absence the camp had grown. Behind our two-man tent were two four-man Drawtites, hooked together end-to-end. Inside Barry, Al, and four Sherpas were eating.

`Hi, Barry, where's Emerson? Didn't he come up with you?'

`No. We started out from Advance Base together yesterday, but he was going so slow it was obvious that he'd never make it to 3W. He said something about trying again today.'

At 7 p.m., Barry called Base.

Corbet (4 W) : Willi and Tom have located Camp 5 at 26,300 feet. The route to Camp 5 is good, the route above Camp 5 looks good. The West Ridge is on schedule. No further traffic. Over.

Prather (Base) : Tremendous ! Tremendous ! Get some snow and soil samples for Will. Over.

Corbet (4 W) : Roger, Roger, All we have to do is hold the bottles up in the air and let the wind do the rest. Over.

Prather (Base) : Norman and the whole gang down here say `Good deal on Camp SW.'

Bishop (Advance Base) : Those of us here at 2 are jumping up and down. Good show! Get some sleep tonight in that heavy wind up there. One last thing-you'd better not count on Emerson from the way things are going. He's moving real slow. We can look up now and see he's just about at the New Dump, about three or four hours out at his present pace, and he said something about a possible bivouac on the way.

Prather (Base) : Norman says here, and it's agreed, that Dick should not fiddle around any more up there. Dick should come down.

Bishop (Advance Base) : Well, we'll have to wait till he gets to 3W and hope there's a radio.

But Dick was nowhere near a radio, or 3W.

`If I was strong,' he wrote later, `I could have made it in a day, but I knew I would either have to bivouac en route or arrive exhausted.

`Lute counselled me against exposing myself to frostbite in the bivouac. However, there was one bottle of oxygen and a convenient crevasse at what had been the New New Dump at a little over 23,000 feet. I had been down in the crevasse before, retrieving a fouled winch cable, and knew it to be suitable. If I slept on oxygen there would be no frostbite. Next day I started up, carrying an air mattress, which I concluded would be more useful than a sleeping-bag. With the crevasse as my objective, I took a slow and steady pace and arrived at dusk feeling very well. I debated continuing the last 700 vertical feet to 3W, but it would be totally dark, and I was confident about the bivouac. In fact, I think I wanted the bivouac, but I don't know exactly why.

`It must have taken me almost two hours to get myself prepared for the night. I found the bottle half buried, put it in my pack, anchored a piece of rope to a picket, and rappeled into the dark hole as light was failing. About thirty feet down, the crevasse closed to four feet wide, plugged with powder snow. I stamped it firm, then started to inflate the mattress. I stopped. (Stupid, you'd better get those crampons off or you'll puncture it for sure.) As I fiddled with things in the dark, I could hear the wind rising. (No worry-but it's dumping a lot of snow in here.) I removed my down gloves to work with the oxygen gear. (Careful! Put the right glove in the right pocket-now left in left. Don't

misplace one. Don't let snow sift into them. Hold the hose in your teeth. Now, work fast with the metal attachments-hose to regulator, regulator to tank-keep the snow away and hope the threads seat well. Good, gloves. Now, down pants over the boots, wind shell, mask in place, regulator in reach. Flow? One litre. And now for sleep. Wait! Let's review: Where's my axe? Upright behind my head. Crampons? In the pack. Damn! I'll bet the flap's open. Goggles? Top left pocket.) This poor-man's countdown put -my mind at ease and I drifted into sleep in perfect comfort, never suspecting the storm I was creating at Base Camp.

`Some time during the night I was awakened by cold around my eyes, where powder snow was sifting in. I was thoroughly warm otherwise, but slowly realized that I was totally buried. I rose to my feet, cradling the oxygen bottle like a baby in one arm. I pulled the mattress to the surface, remade my bed, and listening to the wind roaring past my cavern, immediately fell back to sleep.'

Just after midnight that same evening Al unzipped the entrance to the yellow tent, stuck his head inside, and with effort roused Willi and me to report matter-of-factly, `A couple of tents just blew away.'

Stupid with sleep, we mulled over his news, finally comprehending that the tents he, Barry, and the four Sherpas were in had got loose.

`We're about 150 feet down the hill,' he said, `A real mess. I fixed them down as best I could, but you'd better check on them.'

Fatigue imposed a strange detachment as Willi and I climbed into our boots and parkas. Leaving Al as ballast we stepped out into the staggering blast of the wind. Our headlights lit the swath planed by the sliding tents. Only then did we begin to appreciate the power of the storm, and imagine the horror of suddenly waking to find your tent sliding across the snow, accelerating in a headlong journey toward Tibet. By some miracle the tents had stopped in a shallow depression just below. Like surrealistic sculpture, their external frames were now a mass of contorted tubing from which the skin flapped noisily. The floor was uppermost. The end of Corbet's air mattress protruded from a hole in the side. There was a certain fatalistic humour in the voices within. Willi and I sank ice axes deep in the snow and proceeded to lash the wreckage to them with several lengths of climbing rope.

`All O.K.? Nawang? Everybody comfortable?' Willi called in.

'O.K., Sahib,' came the reply.

`Lemunuk. Good job. Don't leave without us,' he requested. Once the implications were understood, we were answered with good-humoured laughter.

`See you in the morning, Barry. Keep cool,' Willi said.

Leaning into the breeze, we plodded up the hill, fighting for breath every five or six steps. Eventually we poured in on Al, who was holding down the fort, and soon the three of us were sound asleep.

The sun touched the top of Everest before seven on May 17. Four thousand feet below, on the crest of a ridge sat our yellow-orange tent. Beaten nearly to submission, it clung to the mountainside. Roar of wind against the mountain served as background for the staccato vibration of the tent walls. Inside two of us sat hunched at the windward corners, leaning into the gale, convinced our effort was all that held our perch to the mountainside. The third enjoyed brief respite from the battering ordeal that had grown in intensity with the dawn. Above the sky was immaculately blue.

It was enough to give you a headache. I sat at the back corner, leaning into the pole, which obligingly had conformed to the curvature of my spine. My head was being riveted as if by a jackhammer. Al held the other corner, while Willi unfolded a grisly tale of another windstorm from his not forgotten youth. Half the story was lost in the racket of the tent walls. For the moment I found myself not terribly captivated anyway. The power unleashed upon us was frightening. What was there to keep it from sweeping us off the mountain? We were powerless to alter the scheme of things. It was humbling. I wondered briefly what I was doing here, what insanity had led me to become trapped in such a ridiculous endeavour. The thought was rapid, carthartic; anybody so stupid deserves to be in a place like this. Since you're here you might as well enjoy it, T., even Unsoeld's stories.

I looked at Al leaning silently against the other corner. His doubts were under control. And Willi's also. Or was he more talkative than usual? All three of us were certainly aware of our tenuous hold on the hillside, but what could we do besides make light of it?

At eight we called Base Camp on the radio. Corbet was already talking to Prather when we came on.

Corbet (4W-lower site): Let me fill you in. We've had a mishap

during the night. Both Drawtite tents with the four Sherpas and Al and myself blew 15o feet down the slope and we're currently lying in a tangle of oxygen bottles. Al has gone up to join Willi and Tom, both of whom came down-at midnight when it happened, and roped us to the slopes and I guess we're safe. We're currently waiting rescue by Willi and Tom and Al.

Unsoeld (4W-upper site): Can you read 4W now?

Prather (Base) : I read you loud and clear, Willi. Did you get what Barry wanted?

Unsoeld (4 W) : I think I did. Yes, it's going to be a while yet, Bear, because we're just barely holding on to the Gerry tent. Here's a question, Bear; how's the wind down your way? Over.

Prather (Base) : It's blowing a little bit down here, not very hard though-twenty or twenty-five miles per hour. Over.

Unsoeld (4 W) : I see. Well, we may not be able to hold out here much longer, Bear. Tent's taking a beating. Wind's blowing about a hundred pretty steady. Over.

Prather (Base) : We can see a hell of a lot of wind coming off Nuptse and it really sounds bad. There's a big roar we can hear, from down here even. Over.

Unsoeld (4W): I can believe it. Over.

Our growing concern over Dick's whereabouts was relieved when Dingman came on.

Dingman (Advance Base): Willi, did you hear about Emerson? Over.

Unsoeld (4W): No I didn't, Dave. What's the latest word? Over.

Dingman (Advance Base) : We looked out of the tent a few minutes ago and lo and behold, we saw him between the New Dump and the crest, still going up. Over.

Unsoeld (4 W) : Did I get that right? You saw him between the New Dump and the crest and he was going up? Over.

Dingman (Advance Base) : Roger.

Unsoeld (4W): And that was this morning? Over.

Prather (Base) : Roger, that's this morning, just a few minutes ago. Over.

Unsoeld (4 W) : Holy Cow! I can't believe it! Over.

Prather (Base) : Roger. You're not the only one.

Unsoeld (4 W) : That's great news, Dave! Great news! Now if we can get out of this mess, we'll be fine. Over.

Well protected in his fastidiously prepared hole, Dick had hibernated peacefully through the night, oblivious of the storm above. He described what took place when he woke for the second time :

`Soft light filled the crevasse, but I couldn't see the opening above me for the swirling snow. My watch said 7.00, but the light suggested 4.00 (Radio contact is at 8.1 S. Get on your way again by then so they can see you from Camp 2 and know all is well. But no rush now.) So I lay there marvelling at the comfort of such a form-fitting bed, watching the snow sweep by above me with unbelievable velocity.

`Eventually I rose and started putting things in shape. (Will the weather block visibility from Camp 2?) I pulled the plug to let the mattress deflate and found it had frozen up when only half-deflated. I rolled it up under my pack flap and, using the front points of my crampons, started up the rappel rope to rejoin the elements.

`It was 8.45, the sky was blue, and I could see the tents at 2 far below, yet I couldn't see my own feet in the blowing snow. I started up the home stretch for 3W, wondering if I could be seen in the ground blizzard. My route went straight up the 3 5° slope, scoured hard by the cross-wind. Once, standing erect to see over the turmoil of moving particles, I was hit like a hammer by a wind change and did a self-arrest moving horizontally across the slope. I continued steadily on front points and a pick. Soon, snow filtering through the air vents filled my goggles. Since there was no feasible way to clean them, nor any point in doing so, I put them away and continued, squinting out through the wolverine fur of my hood. All I had to do was go straight up. I didn't have to see. The wind tore the partly inflated mattress from my pack and I last saw it gaining altitude westward.'

About nine, Barry crept up the slope to join us. The four Sherpas had headed down to 3W. We felt sure such tremendous power must soon spend itself, but nothing in the behaviour of the wind lent support to our wishful thinking. Momentary lulls left the tent walls hanging limp; the sudden staccatoless silence was filled by the roar of

the wind across the ridge above. Was the storm subsiding? In seconds the answer came, unnecessarily malicious in its suddenness. The tent strained against its anchors in response to a blast that had gained strength in its momentary pause for breath. Then there was just more roar. We decided to retreat while there was still something to retreat from. Al headed out on his hands and knees in search of his rucksack. His concern for something so inconsequential seemed strange.

At Base Camp the crew sat comfortably about the breakfast table sipping tea, listening to the radio set in the corner of the tent.

Dingman (Advance Base) : Have you got the weather forecast?

Prather (Base) : Yes. Just a second here. Forecast is generally cloudy with strong winds and a few snow showers likely. The outlook, a low pressure area is now over Punjab, the one that was over Afghanistan, and may affect us in about forty-eight hours. Over.

Unsoeld (4W): Four to Base. Four to Base. Over.

Prather (Base) : Roger, Willi. Reading you loud and clear. Go ahead.

Unsoeld (4 W) : O.K. Here's the latest report, Bear. (Suddenly the tent began to slide.) O-o-v-e-e-r-r-r!

Prather (Base) : You want the weather report? Over.

Unsoeld (4 W) : God damn! The tent's blowing away!

Prather (Base): Roger. The tent's blowing away. We'll stand by.

Unsoeld (4 W) : Stand by. We're headed over the brink!

Prather (Base) : Roger.

Unsoeld (4 W) : Barry! Out! Out!

Nearest the door, I shucked my mitts, and dove for the zippers, ripping them down. Happily they didn't jam. As we gained speed, I shot from the tent. A metal rappel picket was lying on the snow. I rammed it in, spreading my legs in the vestibule, and held tight. The tent stopped. Barry emerged. `What do we do now, Tom?' he asked, and as I thought, he piled oxygen bottles on the structure to complete what little remained of the final flattening process. I turned to see Willi, hunched low before the wind, still talking on the radio.

Unsoeld (4W): Well, we're all out, the tent's gone, and we're headed

for 3 as fast as possible. Over.

Leaning into the blast, the four of us staggered down to retrieve our axes which held the lower tents to the slope. Suddenly the wind caught the wreckage, whipping it about with a frenzy that threatened to sweep Barry off the mountain. We shouted at him to get away, but he couldn't possibly have heard. A box of food skidded over the snow bound for the depths of the Rongbuk. A sleeping bag shot from a rent in the fabric and, inflating like a giant green windsock, flew upward to disappear into the wall of blowing snow.

Unroped we were blown stumbling and falling the remaining distance to the shelter of the ridge behind the crest. There we could stand erect, but now the wind came in gusts from every direction. Ground blizzard obscured the track. Snow stung my face like flying sand and filtered in to cake the inside of my goggles. I couldn't see a thing. Where'd Willi disappear to? A gust jarred me from the track and I dropped about six feet down a wall. From somewhere Willi appeared and looked down as ifto ask, What are you doing there, Tom ?

It seemed an eternity before we reached the border, crossed over, and started down the other side out of the wind. Only then was there time to think about what had happened. I sat in the snow a hundred feet above the tents to wait, not sure whether Willi was hanging back out of sheer faitgue or for a bit of aloneness. After a while, he trudged slowly into view and settled down beside me. He was tired. The windsculptured ice on his face was like .the frost feathers in winter on timberline trees back in the Northwest. The frozen extension of his nose helda strange fascination, enough for me to overcome fatigue and bring out my camera.

As we sat there, the realization came that we were finished, demolished, literally blasted off the mountain. We hadn't even sunk our teeth solidly into the climb. I felt no gratitude that we had escaped with our lives, only awe at the power unleashed on us, and a dissatisfied feeling of finality to all our dreams. After a while we struggled to our feet and wobbled wearily down to the tents at 3W.

13. Severing the Cord

We were stacked irresolutely about the tent: Barry, Al, Willi, Ang Dorje, Dick, and I. Dick appeared none the worse for his night out. It was hard to regret that we were beaten, so enticing was the prospect of fresh meat and unlimited eggs awaiting us at Base Camp, and the prospect of our homeward journey. To be off this mountain once and for all was the only goal with any meaning. We would have continued down to Advance Base that same day, but we were too tired. We crawled into our bags that night with the feeling that it was all over. The prospect of escaping from this inhospitable lump that could out of sheer whimsy blot us neatly from the scheme of things was pure delight. The lure of home was stronger still, the welling-up of love and longing. And strongest of all was the prospect of finally being freed from the lure of the mountain. The invisible line that linked me to Everest was frayed.

But it hadn't broken. I wasn't yet free to make my own decision. We hadn't given it all we had. Descend now, and we must live the rest of our lives with that knowledge. So the bond still held fast. But it would be sheer fanaticism to suggest going back up. Weary muscles voted against the taunting of my mind; still I couldn't shake it off. Our tents were ruined, a lot of food blown away. And oxygen? Four Sherpas had beat a hasty retreat to Advance Base. Three days ago we had fifteen, now only three remained, Ang Dorje, Passang Tendi, and Tenzing Nindra. We could salvage two four-man tents from here. Maybe we could get a small one from Advance Base. And a couple more Sherpas. But time was running out. We were scheduled to leave Base in a week.

Months before, in our early planning we had toyed with the idea of having only five camps, instead of six as on the Col. It would cut down the number of carries high on the mountain over terrain few of our Sherpas would be skilled enough to climb. The idea was ridiculous. How could we hope to travel farther in a day over steep, difficult terrain than on the easier ground of the regular route? We discarded the idea as naive folly. We'd need at least six camps.Two twoman summit teams on successive days went without saying.

We had been hamstrung by the wind, and new questions kept me awake: Can we possibly consider going up? Suppose we eliminate a camp and try for a very long carry above 4W? A long shot, but it's the only chance we have. Over two thousand vertical feet in a day? Maybe, if the climbing isn't too tough and the loads are light. If we

can get two more Sherpas, that'll still be forty pounds apiece-for just one summit team. There isn't time for a second one anyway. No time to send our recon a day early to locate the high camp. They'll just have to get up early and hope the going is not too hard.

So we have a chance. If the Sherpas will agree to one more carry. It's worth a try. I was bursting to tell my plan to Willi. With the dawn I could contain myself no longer. I kneed him in the ribs.

`Excuse me. I didn't mean to wake you up. But since you are, what do you think of this?'

Willi forced open a sleepy eye and listened, wondering whether what he heard was sheer genius or only my pathological fanatacism. Undoubtedly the latter, he must have thought, but still it was a chance.

'O.K. Let's try it on Barry.'

Barry bit. We crossed to the other tent and accosted Dick and Al. And so it was agreed. We called Base on the radio and Willi presented our plan.

Dyhrenfurth (Base) : Willi, I'm delighted by your plan. This is exactly what we were going to suggest, that only two men make the attempt. And all I can say is, Willi, you've had a hell of a lot of tough luck. You've worked awfully hard. And we're all 200 per cent with you. We wish you all the luck in the world and hope you make it. Over.

Unsoeld (3 W) : Thanks a lot, Norm. We appreciate that and I'm especially appreciative that we're thinking along the same lines. Really, this is probably a terrifically long shot. If we can carry through to 27,000 or so and then have to retreat we would all feel as if we had completed an adequate reconnaissance of the route. With 9o per cent of the labour already done, getting the things up to 4W, it seems too bad to come down without one last all-out push, which, with a little bit of luck, we'll carry out. Thanks a lot, Norm. Over.

Dyliren`urth (Base) : Willi, we all thank God, or course, that you are all alive, that nobody got hurt, and whether you make it or not, in any case you have accomplished miracles. I think the mountaineering world, I'm sure, will recognize that this is an incredible accomplishment on a long and difficult and unknown route. Over.

Willi (3W): Thanks a lot. We share your joy in all being alive, all

right. There were a few times when things were flying around wildly that we weren't sure but that some of the objects were us. And, I don't know, if we just get one break in the weather now, it's entirely possible to go all the way. The Couloir really looks good. The section of it that Tom and I were in looked like it was the steepest of all that we could see and it was a maximum of thirty to thirty-five degrees. So it didn't look like a difficult route as far as we could see. The upper part of the mountain might give us something we can really sink our teeth in. Over.

Dyhrenfurth (Base) : Willi, it sounds very, very good. All the luck in the world. As they say in German, Hals and Beinbruch. Over.

Al took to the air to consult Prather about replacing gear lost in the storm.

Auten (3W): We'll need a couple of packs. Mine and Barry's took off and are somewhere in China by now. Also two pairs of goggles, and two of down mitts. Hornbein says he needs some Bouton goggles, too, and a balaclava. And Jimmy's two-man Gerry tent at Advance Base if he can give it up.

Prather (Base) : Mighty fine. Big Jim sends good word up to you. He's sending his pack up to you, and he says that the pack's been to the summit. It's a very expensive pack. And he says if you lose his pack your soul had better go to Heaven because your ass will be his. Over.

We were completely on our own. For all the wellwishing we knew the impatience of those below to be homeward bound. They knew our chances were dim; it was kindness that they still waited. I guess they also knew we wouldn't come down until we were damned well through. We had kept the ridge attempt alive against an opposition which we thought was founded on doubt and lack of interest. Though hardly burdened with manpower or supplies, we were finally in position.

We rested the next two days, and waited for supplies. On the first morning Al wanted to go down. He had worked hard and well, but only a little of our enthusiasm for the route had rubbed off on him. Now he could see Dick assuming his original role in the foursome, with himself as excess baggage. I protested.

`We need all the manpower we can get.' I said. `Dick's strength is still a big question and any one of the rest of us could wake up sick

tomorrow. Let's not cut it any thinner than it is already. We need you.'

Al stayed.

The 18th and 19th were perfectly clear. Our colourful down clothes bloomed atop the tents. The summit of Everest stood a mile above, windless and inviting. The afternoon of the 19th, Ila Tsering and Tenzing Gyaltso arrived, all smiles, with our fresh supplies. Our discussion that afternoon went once more over the final plans. Till now we had not decided on the final route. Hornbein's Couloir lay far out on the Tibetan North Face, almost in a fall line below the summit; Jake's was a large snowfield leading back up toward the West Ridge. We were drawn toward the latter, because it would return us to the Ridge we had meant to climb. But we no longer had the strength to move a camp up that kind of terrain. We had to get it above 27,000 feet in the easiest way possible. With time for but one long carry, Hornbein's Couloir appeared to offer us the only chance. Where the Couloir went, above the camp, we couldn't guess. We'd just have to take our chances on the final day.

Dick broached the last unaired issue.

`I'd think in all fairness we ought to discuss the choice of the summit team. I don't mind being outspoken since I'm not in shape for it anyway. There's no question that Barry, Tom, and Willi are in the best shape. I think this is the first consideration.'

We weighed the various pairings.

`I think Willi and Tom should go,' Barry said. `For one thing you've plugged harder on the route than any of the rest of us.'

`All the more reason for you to have a turn, Barry,' Willi replied.

In the six weeks we'd been on the mountain, Barry had not tasted a day of real climbing, of pushing a route over new terrain. He'd spent his time humping loads and toiling over the winch, or sitting restlessly at Advance Base. Though he said little, his frustration and disappointment were apparent. He had discovered that there wasn't much real climbing involved in climbing the highest peaks on earth. He was a superb mountaineer. He could have easily gone to the top.

`Another thing,' Corbet continued, `you two have been climbing together; you know each other, and you'll make the strongest team. What's more, you're both just about over the hump. This is my first expedition. I'll be coming back again someday.'

So tentatively Willi and I were to be the summit team. The final decision would be made at our high camp two days later. If either of us fell out, Barry would plug the hole. We tackled the final problem in our tent that night. Barry would reconnoitre to find high camp. We had to decide who would accompany him. They'd have to start early and move fast to find and prepare a route for those following a few hours later. Dick had still not fully recovered from his illness. We doubted he could hold the pace. All things considered, it was decided that Al would go with Barry.

May 20 was the third perfect day in a row. How long could the weather hold? We struck the two tents that were to go to 4W. The snow had drifted level with their flat tops on the uphill side. Then the warmth from inside had caused a layer of ice to form. They were solidly imbedded. Much chopping finally extracted the tents with only a few additional holes for better ventilation. Willi and I sorted personal gear, some to stay at 4W, some to go up. A few pages were torn from the back of our diaries so that Emerson's study could continue uninterrupted without our having to carry the entire books over the summit. Shortly after noon we saddled up, set our oxygen at two litres per minute, and headed for the West Shoulder. The two day's rest had worked wonders.

Thinking of the possible traverse of Everest I said, `You know, Willi, if we're really lucky this may be the last time we see 3W.' We both must have shared the next thought: Yes; and also if we're unlucky.

As we approached the Shoulder we could see the prayer flag Ang Dorje had planted there, flapping in the wind. Like a couple of proud children about to reveal their most treasured hideaway, we watched Dick come over the top for his first view of the other side. His silence as he looked was all we needed to make the moment perfect. We pointed out the landmarks of our route, so far as it went.

As Dick began to photograph the route, Willi remembered leaving his haze filter in my rucksack at 3W. Deciding that such picture-taking opportunities might not come his way again, he left his pack and headed back down. The others moved on up toward 4W to begin the salvage job while I waited on the crest of the ridge for Willi.

For almost the first time during the entire expedition I was completely alone. I sat atop the ridge with my mittens off, soaking up the windless warmth of the afternoon sun. I looked across brown hills, deep glacial valleys, snow peaks ranging westward into haze. My thoughts knew only the restriction imposed by the limits of my ability

to feel and comprehend. A vertical mile above, at the far end of the West Ridge, was the highest point on earth. The day after tomorrow? The dream of childhood, not to be lost? My gaze climbed lightly up each detail of our route, to the base of the Couloir at 26,ooo feet. The rest was unknown, partly hidden, grossly foreshortened, but all there.

Like pain, a mountain can be a subjective sensation; for all its solidity and fixity of form, it is more than what one sees. It is awe, pleasure, respect, love, fear, and much, much more. It is an ever-changing, maturing feeling. Over the weeks since we had first stood on the Shoulder to see the black rock of the last four thousand feet, my feelings toward the climb had steadily ripened. That rock couldn't be divorced from the summit to which it led. Yet each time we looked, the slope seemed a few degrees gentler, the vertical distance not quite so unreasonable. After all, we had climbed steeper faces and longer distances, and on more rotten rock. But all together? And above 27,000 feet instead of half that high? However, you can't see altitude. Might as well ignore it. We chose not to dwell on problems like what happens if you run out of oxygen below the summit. And what it's like to climb on rotten rock at 27,000 feet, ballasted by a forty-pound pack.

Everest came down off Everest. It became, in a climbing sense, just another mountain to be approached and attempted within the context of our past experience in the Rockies, Tetons, or on Mount Rainier. Not quite, really. But much of the battle lay inside. That battle was nearly won.

I looked out beyond the Great Couloir to the step where Mallory and Irvine were last seen. So near the Everest of my boyhood, I felt uneasy, as if I were trespassing on hallowed ground. I looked on the same North Face at which they had looked forty years before; I felt what they must have felt. The past was part of the rightness of our route.

Beyond the remains of the Rongbuk Monastery were the barren hills of Tibet, a strange land of strange people, living beneath the highest mountain on earth-did they know it? What difference did it make to them? I thought of home. It would be night there, everyone asleep. Can Gene feel my thoughts coming home? I took my photo album from my shirt pocket, and looked at the portraits inside. Tears came. Sheer, happy loneliness, the feeling of being nearly finished with the task I had set myself. It wouldn't be long now.

Completely alone. Range on range hazed westward. Beneath me

clouds drifted over the Lho La, chasing their shadows across the flat of the Rongbuk Glacier. I remembered afternoons of my childhood when I watched the changing shapes of clouds against a deep blue sky, seeing elephants and horses and soft mountains. On this lonely ridge I was part of all I saw, a single, feeble heartbeat in the span of time and space about me.

Willi was back. He came steaming up the hill on full flow from a cylinder strapped to his back, his haze filter clutched in one hand. He checked his watch to confirm what undoubtedly must stand as a world's record for the run from 3W to the West Shoulder. Once he had caught his breath we took one last look at the sweep of mountain above us; henceforth we would be too much a part of it, able to locate ourselves only in the memory of this last soaring view. Squandering oxygen, we pressed the pace to join the others in rehabilitating the wreckage of 4W. Most of the oxygen bottles were still there, and enough butane if we used it carefully. But of twelve food boxes only three remained. One, fortunately, contained our high-camp ration. As Barry busily filmed us we began to pitch the tents. Four days before we had been forcibly made aware of the reason for our flat campsite, but there was no place else to put it. We oriented the two four-man tents with their broadsides less exposed to any recurrence of storm. The walls flapped disconcertingly in the westerly breeze. Al carefully enmeshed the cluster with climbing ropes.

WILLI UNSOELD: Calm after the storm: sunset on Everest from Camp

... Naked of life, naked of warmth and safety, bare to the sun and stars, beautiful in its stark snowy loneliness, the Mountain waits ...

Those who will attack it, must stand ready for that meeting to strip themselves of all the ordinary things that men desire, all the normal; and easy and gracious things of life- ready even, if need be, to give up life, itself. In return, the Mountain offers them hardship, and danger ... and an unattainable goal. - It tests them with stern trials. Such a peak seldom need exert its strength. For the little insects who challenge its immensities, it sets high the conditions of victory; and it lets them defeat themselves. Every secret weakness of body or mind or spirit will be mercilessly bared. Only if some persist, if, stripped to essentials, they continue the fight, then at last it will act. And it is far stronger than they. There is no shame being beaten by such an antagonist ....

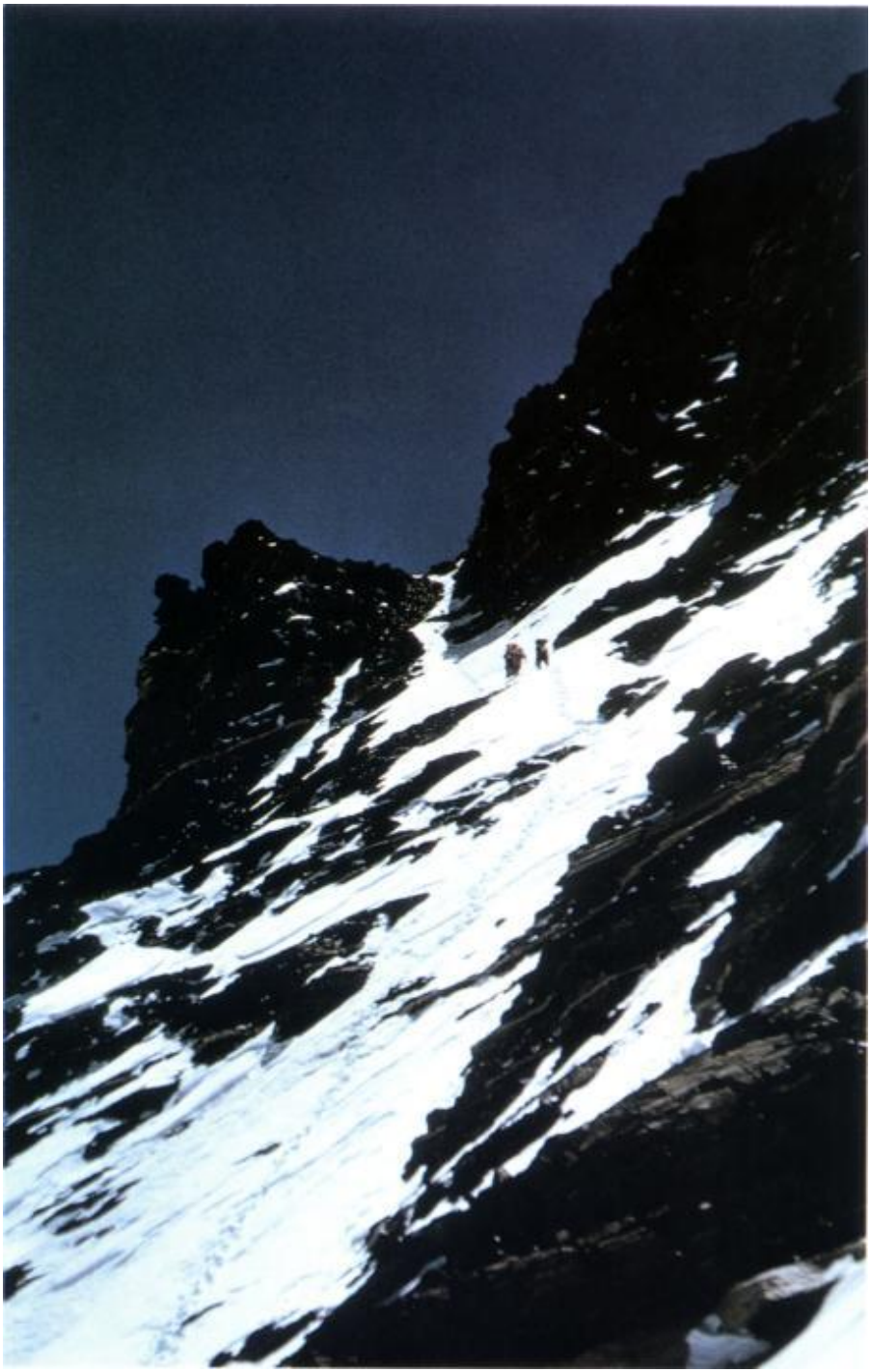
But to those men who are born for mountains, the struggle can never end, until their lives end. To them, it holds the very quintessence of living-the fiery core, after the lesser parts have been burned away ....

On earth there is nothing physically greater than the great unconquered peaks. There is nothing more beautiful. Among their barren snows they hide the ultimate simplicity of spiritual splendor ....

-ELIZABETH KNOWLTON

WILLI UNSOELD: The final carry leaving Camp 4W

WILLI UNSOELD: Emerson and Hornbein in the Diagonal Ditch



WILLI UNSOELD: Sherpas ascending the Diagonal Ditch

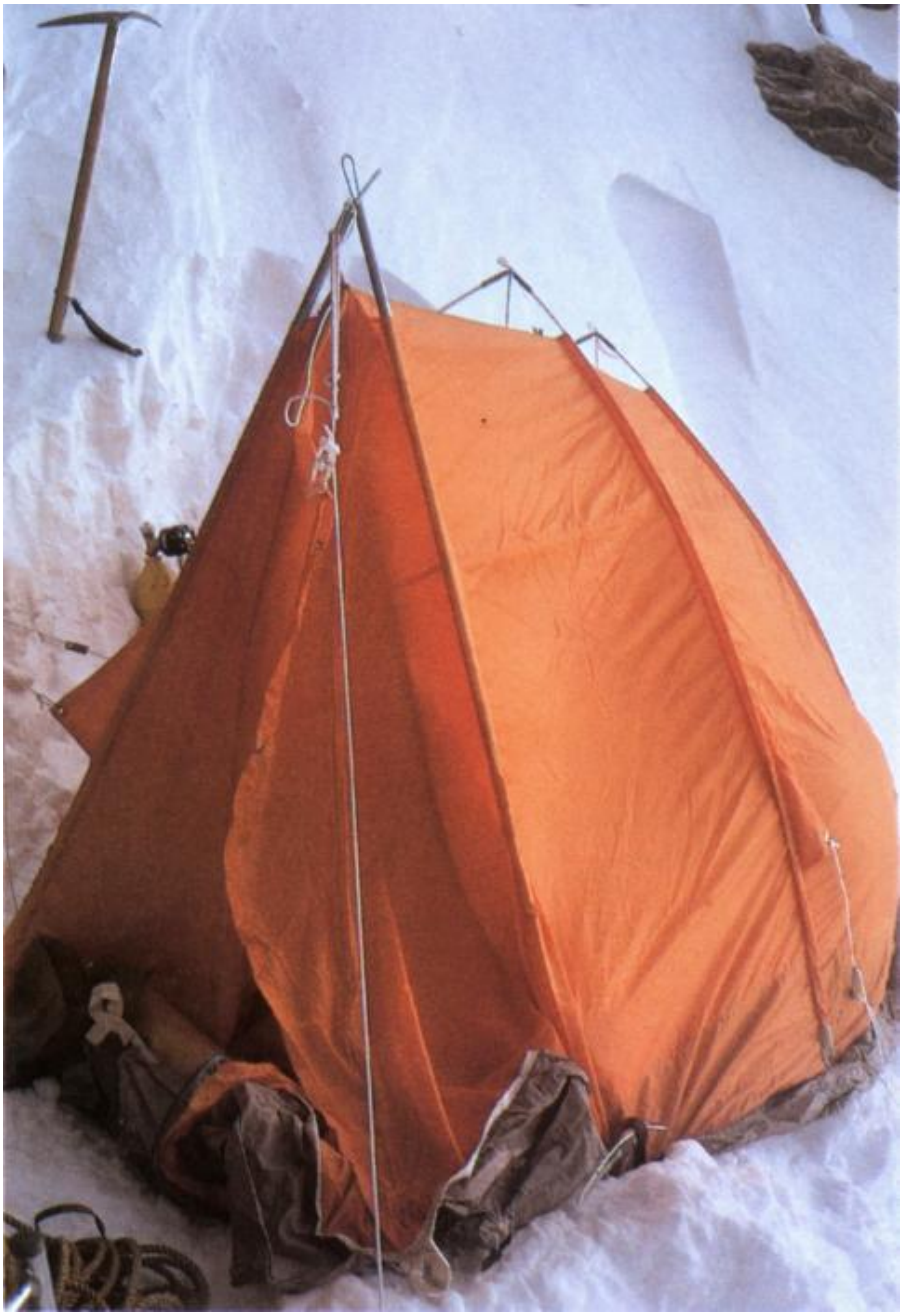
WILLI UNSOELD: Hornhein calculating (?)

WILLI UNSOELD: Emerson recovering from bivouac at Camp 3W

Play for more than you can afford to lose, and you will learn the game.

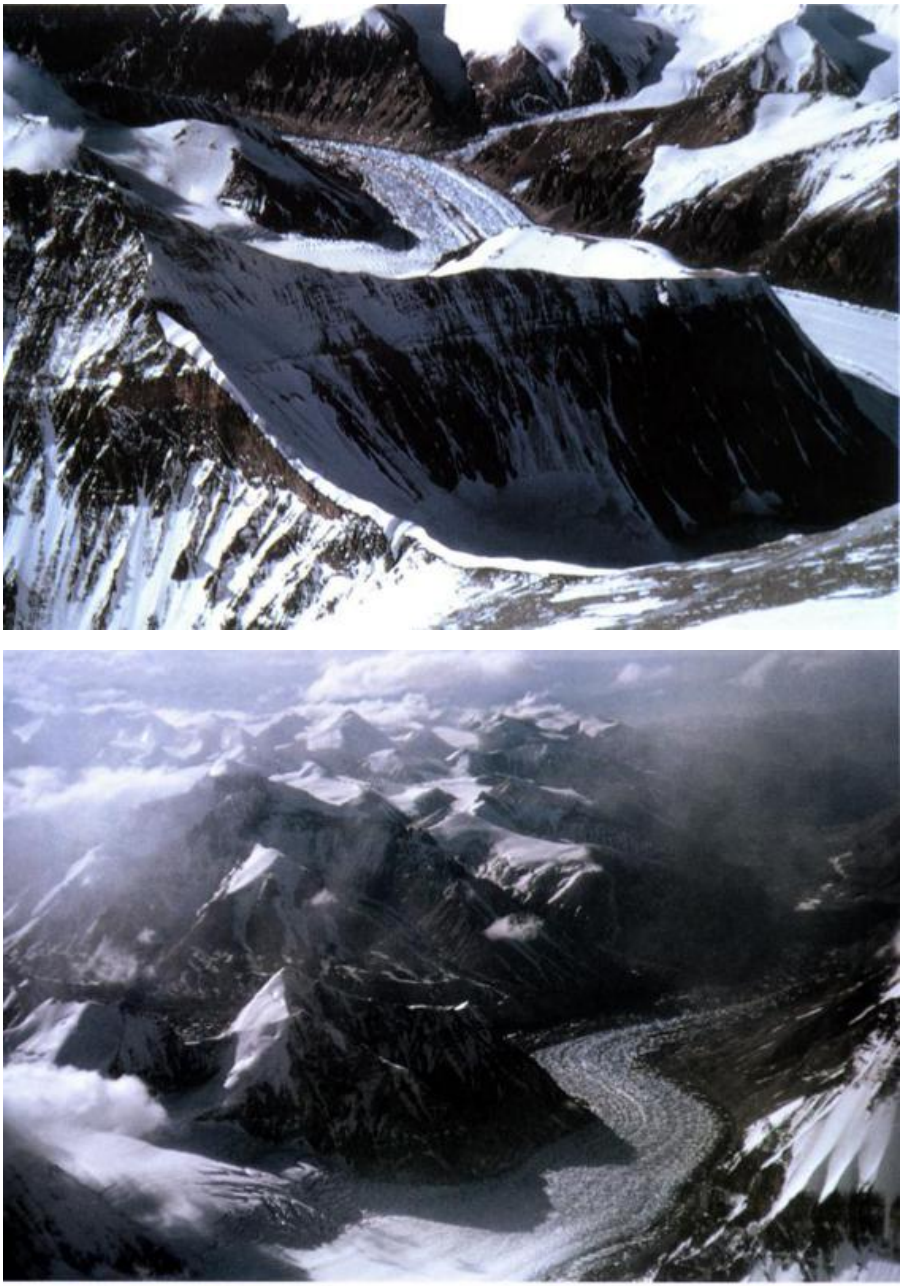
-CHURCHILL.

ALLEN AUTEN: In Hornbein Couloir, Ronghuk Glacier and Changtse in background



WILLI UNSOELD: The tent at Camp 5W

WILLI UNSOELD: North Col , f from high on the North Face



WILLI UNSOELD: Afternoon shadows and clouds, Rongbuk Glacier

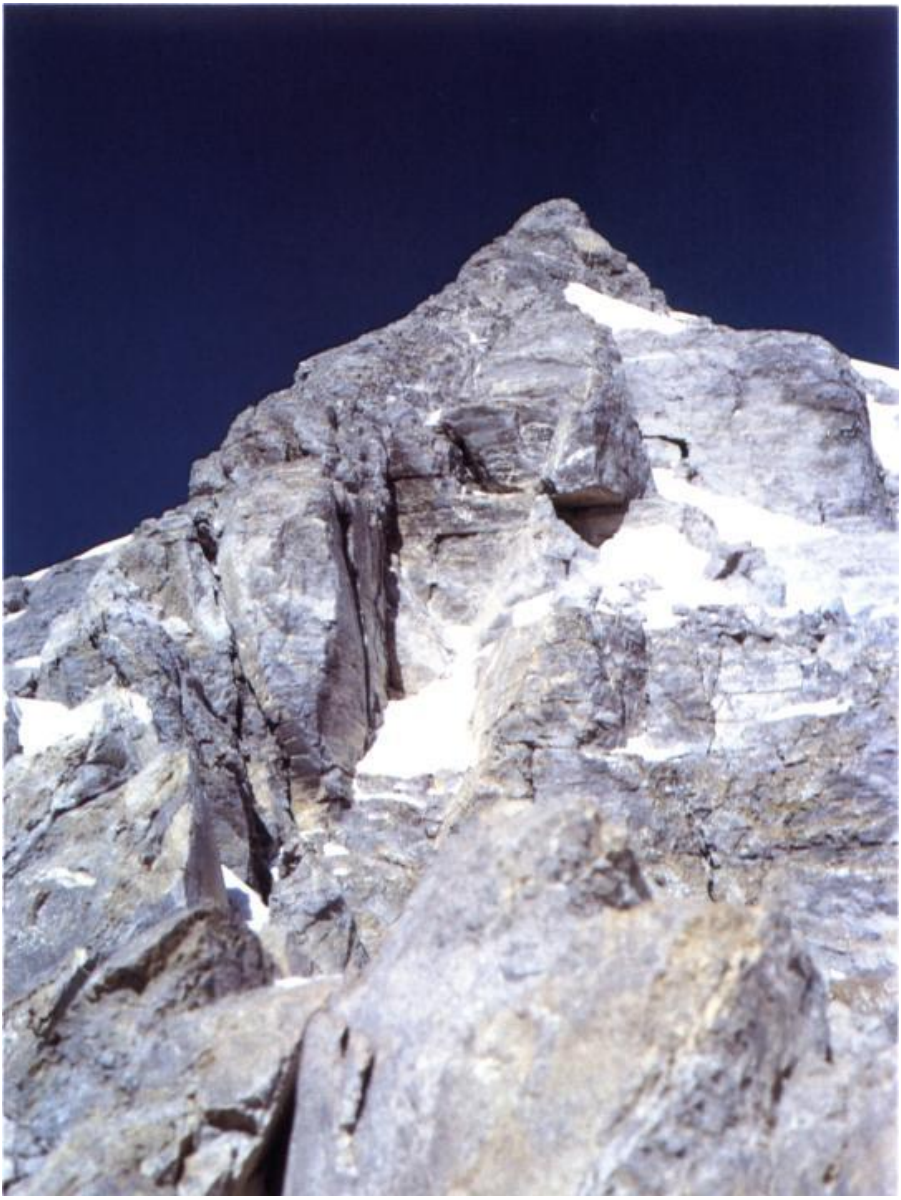
It did not come all at once, that sense of consuming solitude. At first it was just a matter of resting passively amidst spectacular scenery, but this steadily changed into a peculiarly mixed sensation of aroused relaxation; poised and attentive, infinitely at ease. After so much effort, to sit there- totally alone at 25,000 feet, surrounded by a still

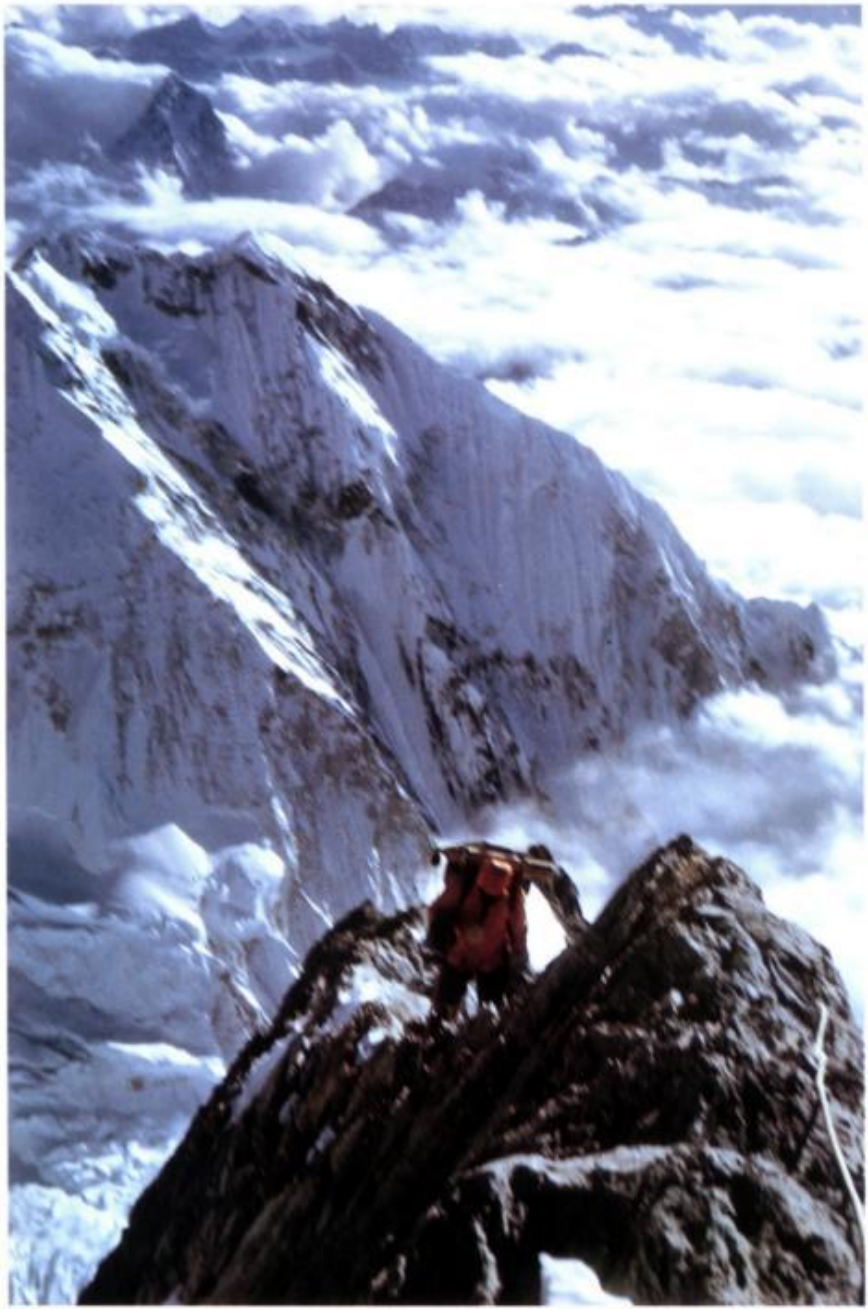
and motionless world of rock and ice and blue-black sky-was satisfying in a very special way. It was not the euphoria of altitude. It was the exhilaration of wilderness. Every feature of my surroundings gave evidence of violent force, yet all was calm and fixed-like a terrible battle scene suddenly frozen in a timeless tableau; the rock and ice polished by snow-blasting winds, the graceful sweep of flutings carved on the walls by avalanche, the grind and furor of the icefalls far below. But everything was silent and motionless ... I remembered Hermann Buhl, and the lonely struggles he had so often won against his monstrous mountain opponent. Could he really have succumbed in this placid setting that surrounds him now? I raised my goggles for an unobstructed view of Beauty. That world of sharp and quiet contrasts became a sudden surge of undifferentiated silver light, bearing in on the interior of my skull from all directions, as though taking out a personal vengeance: "You would presume to see me as I really am!"

- RICHARD M. EMERSON

WILLI UNSOELD: Oxygen tank and South Summit from West Ridge

WILLI UNSOELD: The final rocks, looking up



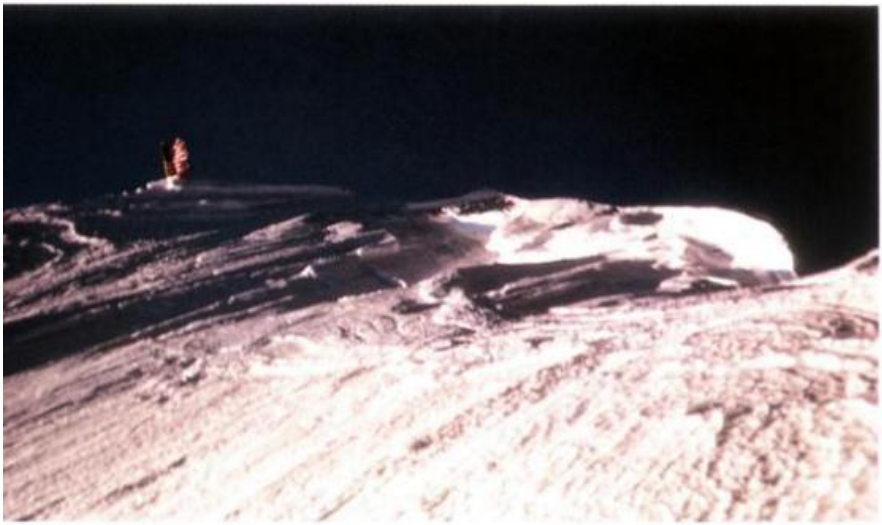


WILLI UNSOELD: The final rocks, looking down on Hornbein

To those who have struggled with them the mountains reveal beauties they will not disclose to those who make no effort. That is the reward the mountains give to effort. And it is because they have so much to give and give it so lavishly to those who will wrestle with them that

men love the mountains and go back to them again and again ... the mountains reserve their choice gifts for those who stand upon their summits.

-SIR FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND



THOMAS HORNBEIN: Summit at sundown

WILLI UNSOELD: Hornhein on summit

Now understand me well-It is provided in the essence of things, that from any fruition of success, no matter what, shall come forth something to make a greater struggle necessary.

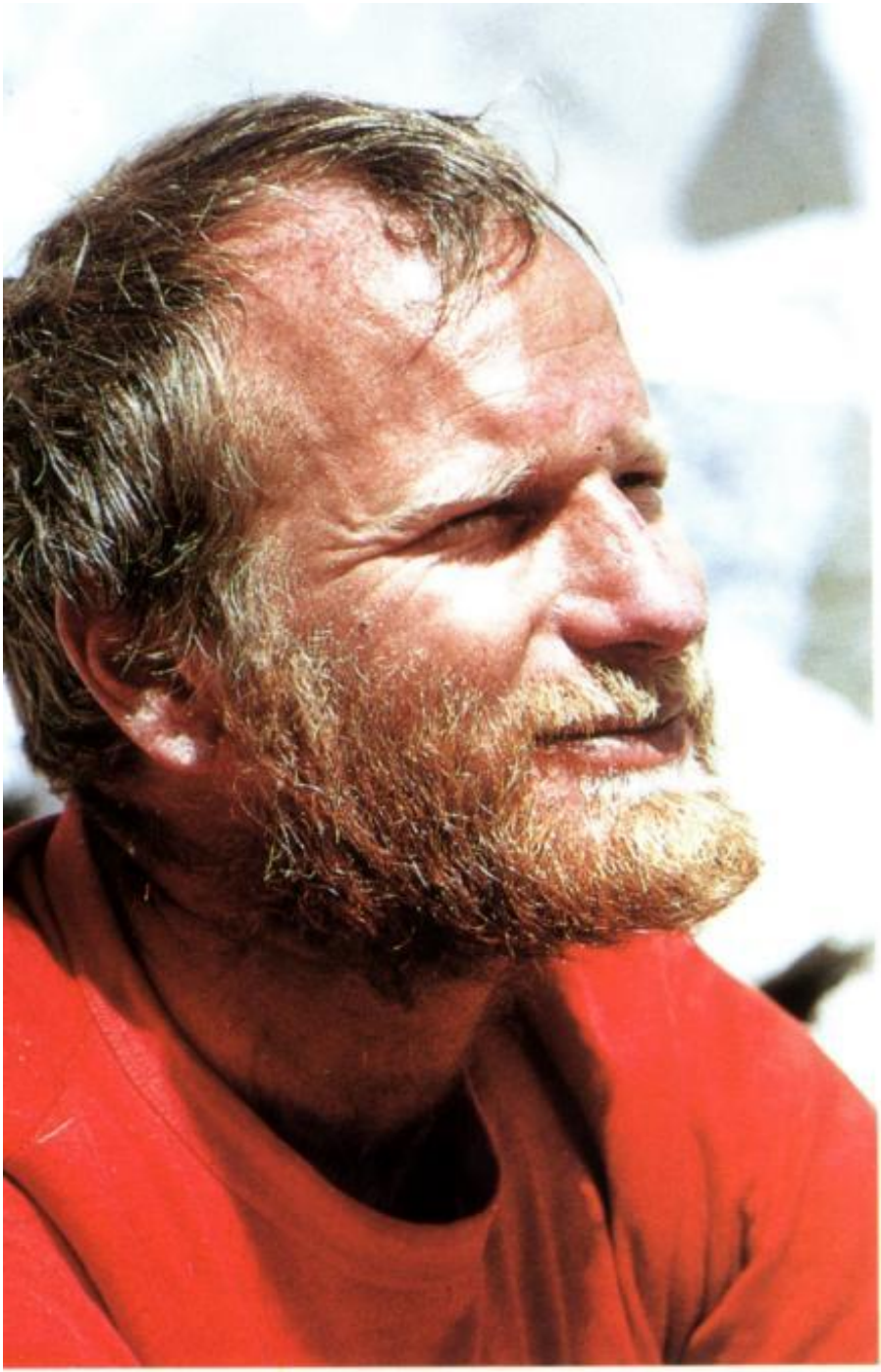
THOMAS HORNBEIN: Lhotse, cornices and footprints

THOMAS HORNBEIN: Summit shadows and Makalu

> Flocks of birds have flown high and away. A solitary drift of cloud, too, has gone, wandering on. And I sit alone with the Ching-Ting Peak, towering beyond. We never grow tired of each other, the mountain and I.
>
> - Li Po (d. 762)

WILLI UNSOELD: West Shoulder from summit

WILLI UNSOELD: Sherpa and Hornh..;vjh

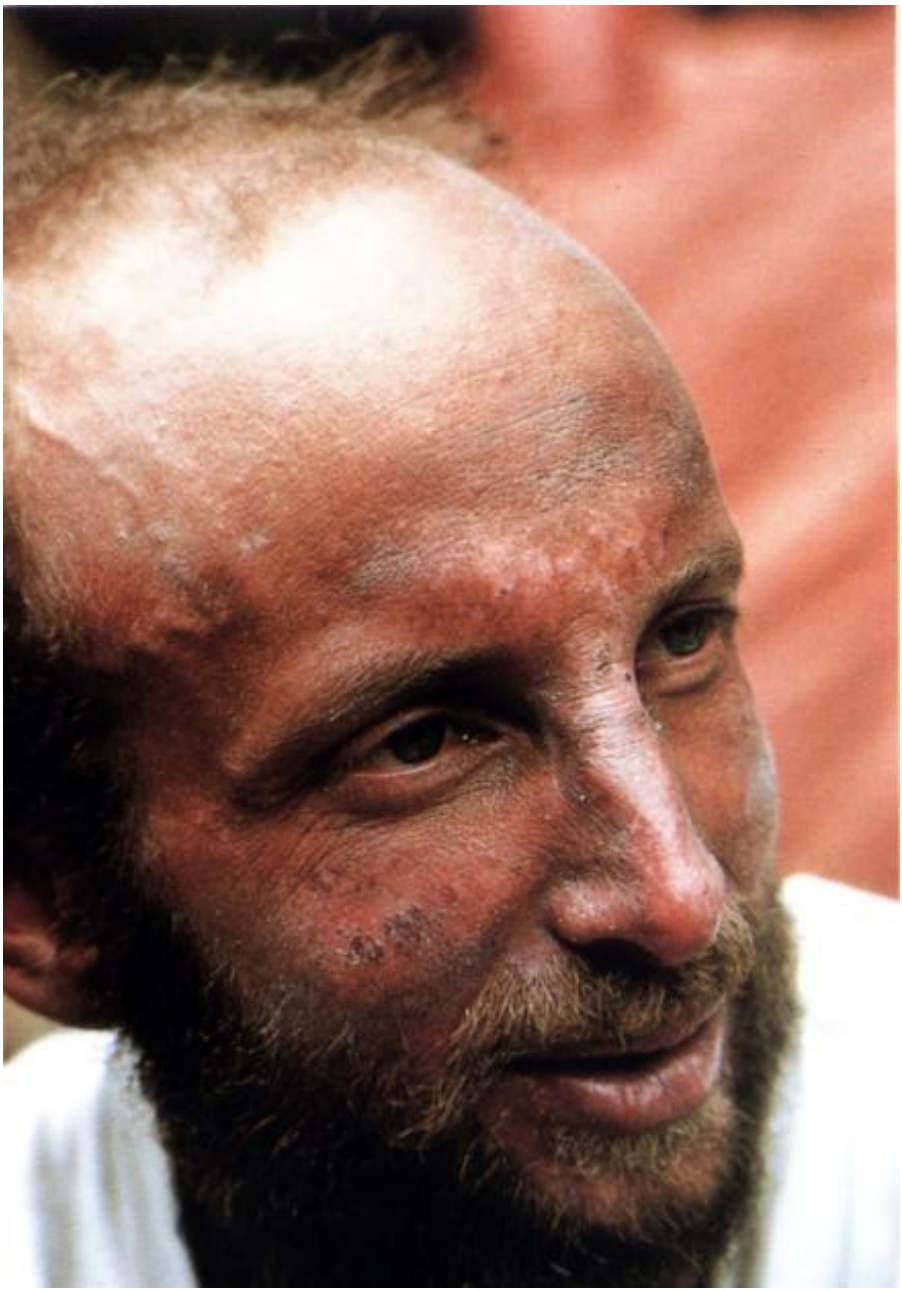


BARRY BISHOP: Unsoeld

The stone grows old. Eternity is not for stones. But I shall go down from this airy space, this swift white peace, this stinging

exultation; And time will close about me, and my soul stir to the rhythm of the daily round. Yet, having known, life will not press so close, And always I shall feel time ravel thin about me. For once I stood In the white windy presence of eternity.

-EUNICE TIETJENS



THOMAS ABERCROMBIE- Hornbein

BARRY BISHOP: The West Ridge (© National Geographic Society)

JAMES LESTER: Jake Breitenbach

THOMAS ABERCROMBIE: Urzsoeld being,-a ried

The remnant of our original two-man tent was suspended from the frame of one of the larger tents; its own poles had been bent beyond repair. This sagging structure was to be Barry's and Dick's. Al would

share one of the big tents with Ang Dorje and Tenzing Gyaltso. Feeling isolated, Al objected. Reluctantly the Sherpas consented to inhabit the ruined tent. They straightaway crawled inside and refused to come out for supper.

`Not hungry, Sahib,' said Ang Dorje, `only need sleep. O.K. tomorrow.'

But we wondered how much they were offended. Knowing the highs and lows of their temperament, we worried that they might remain in bed `sick' in the morning. I crawled into their tent to rig their sleeping oxygen and try to persuade them to have some tea. Later Willi went over through the cold of the night to chat with Ang Dorje.

Our plans for May 21 seemed a little ridiculous. First, Barry and Al had to explore and prepare an unknown route to the site for our high camp, W. We would give them a 22-hour headstart. Next, five untried Sherpas must traverse the North Face, climbing more than two thousand vertical feet with loads, twice the distance ever carried before at that altitude.

In the bitter, pre-sun cold, Al and Barry departed. They carried fixed rope, pitons, ice screws, and one oxygen cylinder each. They also carried all our hopes for the following day. After breakfast Dick, Willi, and I prepared the loads for the Sherpas. I checked the pressure in all the oxygen cylinders, setting aside the six fullest for the final push. By nine the sun was warming the tents, but there was still no sign of Ang Dorje and Tenzing Gyaltso. We began to consider seriously the consequences should they not show, when a smiling face appeared at their tent door.

`Good morning, Sahibs. Ready go,' Ang Dorje said.

Ila Tsering looked over at Ang Dorje, supposedly past his prime but somehow totally infected with the pleasure of our gamble, then at the three other young Sherpas, all on their first expedition.

`All good Sherpas Base Camp, Sahib. Only bad Sherpas up here,' he said.

Delighted laughter, theirs and ours, got us on our way. Each shouldered a load of about forty pounds, counting the oxygen he would use during the day. Ila hefted his load.

`Very heavy, Sahib,' he said. We took turns lifting it.

Sure enough, our food ration weighed about ten pounds more than the other loads. He grinned. `But this last day,' he said, `I carry.'

At 9.30 the five Sherpas were roped together. I checked their masks as they filed past and set their regulators at a flow of i'i litres per minute. They followed Barry and Al's tracks toward the Diagonal Ditch. Twenty minutes later Willi, Dick, and I pulled out. Willi and I carried only a single bottle of oxygen, cameras, radio, flashlight, and our personal belongings.

The Sherpas stayed one jump ahead. The three of us were completely absorbed in the pleasure of climbing together for the first time since Masherbrum. Since our visit five days before, the slope had changed radically. Entire snowfields had been blasted into oblivion, leaving us to scrape our crampons across an abundance of downsloping, fractured rubble. Far ahead we could see the figures of Barry and Al silhouetted against the snow as they disappeared into Hornbein's Couloir.

For me the pleasure of the walk was tempered by anxiety. Could Al and Barry get to 27,500?

It was early afternoon before we reached the base of the Couloir, at 26,250 feet. Showers of ice cascading from above drew our attention to the tiny figures etched against the snow eight hundred feet higher. Barry was chopping away for all he was worth, hewing a staircase for us. We Joined the Sherpas under a partly protected wall to await the end of the onslaught and nibble a bit of lunch. The Sherpas seemed less enthusiastic as they huddled to avoid the constant bombardment of ice spewing out the end of the gully and whirring past our heads with a high-pitched whine. We dallied over our sardines, pineapple, and chocolate, all frozen tasteless. The prospect of entering the gully was too much like becoming tenpins in a high-angle bowling alley.

A little after 2 P.M. the ice fall abated. With Ang Dorje paternally in the lead, the Sherpas started up, their flow increased to 3 litres per minute. Dick had reached this select 8,ooo-metre level with little difficulty. He would have liked to go higher, but it seemed more sensible for him to remain here, conserving his energy and oxygen to assist the others on their late return to 4W. Our masks could not hide tears when it came time to head on up.

`Must be the altitude,' said Willi.

`Don't do anything foolish, you nuts,' Dick said. Then, as an

afterthought, with a twinkle in his eye, `See you back at 2.'

For a long time as we climbed we could look down on the back of Dick's head as he sat on that lonely ledge, looking out into Tibet.

The shadows were lengthening across the glaciers twelve thousand feet below. It was nearly 4 p.m. when we looked up to see Al and Barry, their two heads peering gnomelike from a snow ledge at the base of the Yellow Band. We shouted encouragement to the Sherpas, now below us, for they were beginning to suspect their Sahibs of wanting to pitch the last camp on the summit itself. The slope of the staircase Barry had carved steepened to about forty degrees as we came up to them. He filmed our arrival.

'O.K. Willi, come up around the end and turn toward me, and smile.'

Willi smiled beneath his oxygen mask. My first breathless question as I reached the ledge was, `How high are we, Barry?'

`The altimeter says 27,200 and its still rising.'

`Wow! Tremendous. You guys did it!'

We'd have a long day tomorrow-but it was possible.

Willi had been hastily surveying their choice of a campsite. It was a wind-scooped depression running beneath the cliff for about ten feet. At the wide end it might have been twelve inches across.

`Where'd you find such spacious accommodations?' he asked.

`We knew you'd be satisfied with nothing but the best,' Barry said, `but it's the only possibility we've seen all afternoon. Anyway you'll be able to keep warm digging a platform when we leave. Only please don't knock any ice down on us.'

With the Sherpas clinging to the slope by their axes, we hacked out a hasty ledge, then gingerly passed the tent, food, and oxygen bottles up to it.

`Careful. If we lose a bottle of oxygen we're through.'

It would be dark before they reached 4W. Again tears came as we thanked Ang Dorje, Ila, the two Tenzings, and Passang Tendi. `Good luck, Sahib,' each one said as we clasped hands. Then we said goodbye to Barry. And to Al. Barry sank his axe into the snow to anchor the

rope. Al led off, followed by the Sherpas. They slid quickly down the fixed line. Then Barry pulled his axe, descended carefully to them and repeated the process.

`Just like guiding Mount Owen, Willi,' he shouted up.

There was only a brief moment to feel the grandeur of our impending isolation. We had to contrive some architectural plan for carving a tent platform from an excessively steep slope of snow.

`How about parallel to the cliff?' I asked.

`I think it'll take less digging if we diagonal it out into the gully.'

For the next hour and a half we chopped, jumping on the pieces to pulverize them to a size less painful should they accidently be launched on to the party descending below. Every effort was breathtakingly slow.

`Think it's big enough?' Willi asked.

`Let's give it a try.'

With the wind threatening to blow it away, we pitched the tent.

`Nope. Not quite big enough. It seems to hang over a bit on the outside,' I said. The platform was a good foot too narrow.

`How much do you weigh, Tom, boy?'

About 130, stripped. Why?'

`I have you by twenty-five pounds. Maybe you better sleep on the outside.'

I climbed in to start supper while Willi secured the tent to the slope. One rock piton driven half an inch into the rotten rock of the Yellow Band anchored the uphill ties, our axes buried to the hilt in equally rotten snow pinned the outside corners.

Willi ceremoniously planted the prayer flag Ang Dorje had left. `I think we'd better count on this,' he said.

It promised to be a classical high-camp night on Everest: wind batters the tent while its occupants cling to the poles inside, sipping a cold cup of meagre tea. We had the wind, the insecure platform-and the enticing prospect of a twomile vertical ride- into Tibet if our tent

let go. But these modern tents had the poles on the outside; there was nothing to cling to. We turned to our meagre fare. This began with chicken-rice soup, followed by a main course of butterfried, freeze-dried shrimp in a curried tomato sauce, crackers and blackberry Jain, and a can of grapefruit segments for dessert. All this was interspersed with many cups of steaming bouillon. Our greatest sorrow was that we could do away with only two-thirds of the four-man luxury ration. We turned to a bit of oxygen as a chaser; once again we had overeaten.

Everything was readied for an early start. For this one night I succumbed to Unsoeld's slovenly habit of sleeping fully clothed, except for boots, which were the foundation under the outer half of my air mattress. While Willi stacked the oxygen bottles in the vestibule, I melted snow for tomorrow's water. This and the butane stoves would share the warmth of our sleeping bags to prevent their freezing during the night.

About nine Willi awoke from his after-dinner nap, gripped by an overwhelming urge to relieve himself which had for some time been overwhelming me. I promptly encouraged his leaving the tent by offering him a belay.

`No thanks, Tom. A guide can handle these things himself.'

He disappeared into the gusty blackness, his flashlight inscribing chaotic circles of light. What a horrible way to go, I thought. And he has the flashlight!

After a time he returned, triumphant. We finished the evening religiously filling out Emerson's diary. Once more violating the classical Everest tradition, we turned our sleeping oxygen to one litre each and settled into the humidity of our plastic sleeping masks. To the lullaby of the wind shaking our high and lonely dwelling, we fell into a deep sleep. But just before that I wrote a letter home, without oxygen:

Mayas

Camp 5W, 27,200

GENIE:

just a brief note on our hopeful summit eve. 9.00 p.m. Willi and I perched in a hacked-out platform at the base of the Yellow Band in Hornbein's Couloir. The morrow greets us with 2,000 feet to the top, the first of which looks like some good rock-climbing. Very breathless

without oxygen. Mainly, as wind rattles the tent and I hang slightly over the edge, would have you know I love you. Tomorrow shall spell the conclusion to our effort, one way or another.

Good night.

Love always,

TOM

14. Promises to Keep...

At four the oxygen ran out, a most effective alarm clock. Two well-incubated butane stoves were fished from inside our sleeping bags and soon bouillon was brewing in the kitchen. Climbing into boots was a breathless challenge to balance in our close quarters. Then overboots, and crampons.

`Crampons, in the tent?'

`Sure,' I replied, `It's a hell of a lot colder out there.'

`But our air mattresses!,

`Just be careful. We may not be back here again, anyway. I hope.'

We were clothed in multilayer warmth. The fishnet underwear next to our skin provided tiny air pockets to hold our body heat. It also kept the outer layers at a distance which, considering our weeks without a bath, was respectful. Next came Duofold underwear, a wool shirt, down underwear tops and bottoms, wool climbing pants, and a lightweight wind parka. In spite of the cold our down parkas would be too bulky for difficult climbing, so we used them to insulate two quarts of hot lemonade, hoping they might remain unfrozen long enough to drink during the climb. Inside the felt inner liners of our reindeer-hair boots were innersoles and two pairs of heavy wool socks. Down shells covered a pair of wool mittens. Over our oxygen helmets we wore wool balaclavas and our parka hoods. The down parka lemonademuff was stuffed into our packs as padding between the two oxygen bottles. With camera, radio, flashlight, and sundry mementos (including the pages from Emerson's diary), our loads came close to forty pounds. For all the prior evening's planning it was more than two hours before we emerged.

I snugged a bowline about my waist, feeling satisfaction at the ease with which the knot fell together beneath heavily mittened hands. This was part of the ritual, experienced innumerable times before. With it came a feeling of security, not from the protection provided by the rope joining Willi and me, but from my being able to relegate these cold grey brooding forbidding walls, so high in such an unknown world, to common reality-to all those times I had ever tied into a rope before : with warm hands while I stood at the base of sun-baked granite walls in the Tetons, with cold hands on a winter night while I prepared to tackle my first steep ice on Longs Peak. This knot

tied me to the past, to experiences known, to difficulties faced and overcome. To tie it here in this lonely morning on Everest brought my venture into context with the known, with that which man might do. To weave the knot so smoothly with clumsily mittened hands was to assert my confidence, to assert some competence in the face of the waiting rock, to accept the challenge.

Hooking our masks in place we bade a slightly regretful goodbye to our tent, sleeping bags, and the extra supply of food we hadn't been able to eat. Willi was at the edge of the ledge looking up the narrow gully when I joined him.

`My oxygen's hissing, Tom, even with the regulator turned off.'

For the next twenty minutes we screwed and unscrewed regulators, checked valves for ice, to no avail. The hiss continued. We guessed it must be in the valve, and thought of going back to the tent for the spare bottle, but the impatient feeling that time was more important kept us from retracing those forty feet.

`It doesn't sound too bad,' I said. `Let's just keep an eye on the pressure. Besides if you run out we can hook up the sleeping T and extra tubing and both climb on one bottle.' Willi envisioned the two of us climbing Everest in lockstep, wed by six feet of rubber hose.

We turned to the climb. It was ten minutes to seven. Willi led off. Three years before in a tent high on Masherbrum he had expounded on the importance of knee-to-toe distance for step-kicking up steep snow. Now his anatomical advantage determined the order of things as he put his theory to the test. Right away we found it was going to be difficult. The Couloir, as it cut through the Yellow Band, narrowed to ten or fifteen feet and steepened to fifty degrees. The snow was hard, too hard to kick steps in, but not hard enough to hold crampons; they slid disconcertingly down through this wind-sheltered, granular stuff. There was nothing for it but to cut steps, zigzagging back and forth across the gully, occasionally finding a bit of rock along the side up which we could scramble. We were forced to climb one at a time with psychological belays from axes thrust a few inches into the snow. Our regulators were set to deliver two litres of oxygen per minute, half the optimal flow for this altitude. We turned them off when we were belaying to conserve the precious gas, though we knew that the belayer should always be at peak alertness in case of a fall.

We crept along. My God, I thought, we'll never get there at this rate. But that's as far as the thought ever got. Willi's leads were meticulous,

painstakingly slow and steady. He plugged tirelessly on, deluging me with showers of ice as his axe carved each step. When he ran out the hundred feet of rope he jammed his axe into the snow to belay me. I turned my oxygen on to `a' and moved up as fast as I could, hoping to save a few moments of critical time. By the time I joined him I was completely winded, gasping for air, and sorely puzzled about why. Only late in the afternoon, when my first oxygen bottle was still going strong, did I realize what a low flow of gas my regulator was actually delivering.

Up the tongue of snow we climbed, squeezing through a passage where the walls of the Yellow Band closed in, narrowing the Couloir to shoulder width.

In four hours we had climbed only four hundred feet. It was i i a.m. A rotten bit of vertical wall forced us to the right onto the open face. To regain the Couloir it would be necessary to climb this sixty-foot cliff, composed of two pitches split by a broken snow-covered step.

`You like to lead this one?' Willi asked.

With my oxygen off I failed to think before I replied, `Sure, I'll try it.'

The rock sloped malevolently outward like shingles on a roof-rotten shingles. The covering of snow was no better than the rock. It would pretend to hold for a moment, then suddenly shatter and peel, cascading down on Willi. He sank a piton into the base of the step to anchor his belay.

I started up around the corner to the left, crampon points grating on rusty limestone. Then it became a snowploughing procedure as I searched for some sort of purchase beneath. The pick of my axe found a crack. Using the shaft for gentle leverage, I moved carefully onto the broken strata of the step. I went left again, loose debris rolling under my crampons, to the base of the final vertical rise, about eight feet high. For all its steepness, this bit was a singularly poor plastering job, nothing but wobbly rubble. I searched about for a crack, unclipped a big angle piton from my sling, and whomped it in with the hammer. It sank smoothly, as if penetrating soft butter. A gentle lift easily extracted it.

`Hmmm. Not too good,' I mumbled through my mask. On the fourth try the piton gripped a bit more solidly. Deciding not to loosen it by testing, I turned to the final wall. Its steepness threw my weight out

from the rock, and my pack became a downright hindrance. There was an unlimited selection of handholds, mostly portable. I shed my mittens. Forafew seconds the rock felt comfortably reassuring but cold. Then not cold any more. My eyes tried to direct sensationless fingers. Flakes peeled out beneath my crampons. I leaned out from the rock to move upward, panting like a steam engine. Damn it, it'll go; I know it will, T, I thought. But my grip was gone. I hadn't thought to turn my oxygen up.

`No soap,' I called down. `Can't make it now. Too pooped.'

`Come on down. There may be a way to the right.'

I descended, half rappeling from the piton, which held. I had spent the better part of an hour up there. A hundred feet out we looked back. Clearly we had been on the right route, for above that last little step the gully opened out. A hundred feet higher the Yellow Band met the grey of the summit limestone. It had to get easier.

`You'dbettertake it, Willi. I've wastedenough time already.'

`Hell, if you couldn't make it, I'm not going to be able to do any better.'

`Yes you will. It's really not that hard. I was just worn out from putting that piton in. Turn your regulator clear open, though.'

Willi headed up around the corner, moving well. In ten minutes his rope was snapped through the high piton. Discarding a few unsavoury holds, he gripped the rotten edge with his unmittened hands. He leaned out for the final move. His pack pulled. Crampons scraped, loosing a shower of rock from beneath his feet. He was over. He leaned against the rock, fighting for breath.

`Man, that's work. But it looks better above.'

Belayed, I followed, retrieved the first piton, moved up, and went to work on the second. It wouldn't come. `Guess it's better than I thought,' I shouted. `I'm going to leave it.' I turned my oxygen to four litres, leaned out from the wall, and scrambled up. The extra oxygen helped, but it was surprising how breathless such a brief effort left me.

`Good lead,' I panted. `That wasn't easy.'

`Thanks. Let's roll.'

Another rope-length and we stopped. After six hours of hiss Willi's first bottle was empty. There was still a long way to go, but at least he could travel ten pounds lighter without the extra cylinder. Our altimeter read 27,900. We called Base on the walkie-talkie.

Willi: West Ridge to Base. West Ridge to Base. Over.

Base (Jim Whittaker, excitedly) : This is Base here, Willi. How are you? How are things going? What's the word up there? Over.

Willi: Man, this is a real bearcat! We are nearing the top of the Yellow Band and it's mighty tough. It's too damned tough to try to go back. It would be too dangerous.

Base (Jim) : I'm sure you're considering all about your exits. Why don't you leave yourself an opening? If it's not going to pan out, you can always start working your way down. I think there is always a way to come back.

Willi: Roger, Jim. We're counting on a further consultation in about two or three hundred feet. It should ease up by then! Goddammit, if we can't start moving together, we'll have to move back down. But it should be easier once the Yellow Band is passed. Over.

Base (Jim) : Don't work yourself up into a bottleneck, Willi. How about rappeling? Is that possible, or don't you have any reepschnur or anything? Over.

Willi: There are no rappel points, Jim, absolutely no rappel points. There's nothing to secure a rope to. So it's up and over for us today ...

While the import of his words settled upon those listening io,ooo feet below, Willi went right on:

Willi (continuing): . . . and we'll probably be getting in pretty late, maybe as late as seven or eight o'clock tonight.

As Willi talked, I looked at the mountain above. The slopes looked reasonable, as far as I could see, which wasn't very far. We sat at the base of a big, wide-open amphitheatre. It looked like summits all over the place. I looked down. Descent was totally unappetizing. The rotten rock, the softening snow, the absence of even tolerable piton cracks only added to our desire to go on. Too much labour, too many sleepless nights, and too many dreams had been invested to bring us this far. We couldn't come back for another try next weekend. To go down now, even if we could have, would be descending to a future

marked by one huge question: what might have been? It would not be a matter of living with our fellow man, but simply living with ourselves, with the knowledge that we had had more to give.

I listened, only mildly absorbed in Willi's conversation with Base, and looked past him at the convexity of rock cutting off our view of the gully we had ascended. Above-a snowfield, grey walls, then blue-black sky. We were committed. An invisible barrier sliced through the mountain beneath our feet, cutting us off from the world below. Though we could see through, all we saw was infinitely remote. The ethereal link provided by our radio only intensified our separation. My wife and children seemed suddenly close. Yet home, life itself, lay only over the top of Everest and down the other side. Suppose we fail? The thought brought no remorse, no fear. Once entertained, it hardly seemed even interesting. What now mattered most was right here: Willi and I, tied together on a rope, and the mountain, its summit not inaccessibly far above. The reason we had come was within our grasp. We belonged to the mountain and it to us. There was anxiety, to be sure, but it was all but lost in a feeling of calm, of pleasure at the joy of climbing. That we couldn't go down only made easier that which we really wanted to do. That we might not get there was scarcely conceivable.

Willi was still talking.

Willi : Any news of Barry and Lute? Over.

Jim: I haven't heard a word from them. Over.

Willi: How about Dingman?

Jim: No word from Dingman. We've heard nothing, nothing at all.

Willi: Well listen, if you do get hold of Dingman, tell him to put a light in the window because we're headed for the sum- mit,Jim. We can't possibly get back to our camp now. Over.

I stuffed the radio back in Willi's pack. It was i p.m. From here we could both climb at the same time, moving across the last of the yellow slabs. Another hundred feet and the Yellow Band was below us. A steep tongue of snow flared wide, penetrating the grey strata that capped the mountain. The snow was hard, almost ice-hard in places. We had only to bend our ankles, firmly plant all twelve crampon points, and walk uphill. At last, we were moving, though it would have appeared painfully slow to a distant bystander.

As we climbed out of the Couloir the pieces of the puzzle fell into place. That snow rib ahead on the left skyline should lead us to the Summit Snowfield, a patch of perpetual white clinging to the North Face at the base of Everest's final pryamid. By three we were on the Snowfield. We had been climbing for eight hours and knew we needed to take time to refuel. At a shaly outcrop of rock we stopped for lunch. There was a decision to be made. We could either cut straight to the northeast ridge and follow it west to the summit, or we could traverse the face and regain the West Ridge. From where we sat, the Ridge looked easier. Besides, it was the route we'd intended in the first place.

We split a quart of lemonade that was slushy with ice. In spite of its down parka wrapping, the other bottle was already frozen solid, as were the kippered snacks. They were almost tasteless but we downed them more with dutiful thoughts of calories than with pleasure.

To save time we moved together, diagonalling upward across down-sloping slabs of rotten shale. There were no possible stances from which to belay each other. Then snow again, and Willi kicked steps, fastidiously picking a route between the outcropping rocks. Though still carting my full load of oxygen bottles, I was beginning to feel quite strong. With this excess energy came impatience, and an unconscious anxiety over the high stakes for which we were playing and the lateness of the day. Why the hell is Willi going so damned slow? I thought. And a little later: He should cut over to the Ridge now; it'll be a lot easier.

I shouted into the wind, `Hold up, Willi!' He pretended not to hear me as he started up the rock. It seemed terribly important to tell him to go to the right. I tugged on the rope. `Damn it, wait up, Willi!' Stopped by a taut rope and an unyielding Hornbein, he turned, and with some irritation anchored his axe while I hastened to join him. He was perched, through no choice of his own, in rather cramped, precarious quarters. I sheepishly apologized.

We were on rock now. One rope-length, crampons scraping, brought us to the crest of the West Ridge for the first time since we'd left camp 4W yesterday morning. The South Face fell eight thousand feet to the tiny tents of Advance Base. Lhotse, straight across the face, was below us now. And near at hand a hundred and fifty feet higher. the South Summit of Everest shone in the afternoon sun. We were within four hundred feet of the top! The wind whipped across the ridge from the north at nearly sixty miles an hour. Far below, peak shadows reached long across the cloud-filled valleys. Above, the Ridge rose, a twisting,

rocky spine.

We shed crampons and overboots to tackle this next rocky bit with the comforting grip of cleated rubber soles. Here I unloaded my first oxygen bottle though it was not quite empty. It had lasted ten hours, which obviously meant I was getting a lower flow than indicated by the regulator. Resisting Willi's suggestion to drop the cylinder off the South Face, I left it for some unknown posterity. When I resaddled ten pounds lighter, I felt I could float to the top.

The rock was firm, at least in comparison with our fare thus far. Climbing one at a time, we experienced the joy of delicate moves on tiny holds. The going was a wonderful pleasure, almost like a day in the Rockies. With the sheer drop to the Cwm beneath us, we measured off another four rope-lengths. Solid rock gave way to crud, then snow. A thin, firm, knife-edge of white pointed gently toward the sky. Buffeted by the wind, we laced our crampons on, racing each other with rapidly numbing fingers. It took nearly twenty minutes. Then we were off again, squandering oxygen at three litres per minute, since time seemed the shorter commodity at the moment. We moved together, Willi in front. It seemed almost as if we were cheating, using oxygen; we could nearly run this final bit.

Ahead the North and South ridges converged to a point. Surely the summit wasn't that near? It must be off behind. Willi stopped. What's he waiting for, I wondered as I moved to join him. With a feeling of disbelief I looked up. Forty feet ahead, tattered and whipped by the wind, was the flag Jim had left three weeks before. It was 6.15. The sun's rays sheered horizontally across the summit. We hugged each other as tears welled up, ran down across our oxygen masks, and turned to ice.

15 ...and Miles to Go...

Just rock, a dome of snow, the deep blue sky, and a hunk of orange-painted metal from which a shredded American flag cracked in the wind. Nothing more. Except two tiny figures walking together those last few feet to the top of the earth.

For twenty minutes we stayed there. The last brilliance of the day cast the shadow of our summit on the cloud plain a hundred miles to the east. Valleys were filled with the indistinct purple haze of evening, concealing the dwellings of man we knew were there. The chill roar of wind made speaking difficult, heightening our feeling of remoteness. The flag left there seemed a feeble gesture of man that had no purpose but to accentuate the isolation. The two of us who had dreamed months before of sharing this moment were linked by a thin line of rope, joined in the intensity of companionship to those inaccessibly far below, Al and Barry and Dick-and Jake.

From a pitch of intense emotional and physical drive it was only partly possible to become suddenly, completely the philosopher of a balmy afternoon. The head of steam was too great, and the demands on it still remained. We have a long way to go to get down, I thought. But the prospect of descent of an unknown side of the mountain in the dark caused me less anxiety than many other occasions had. I had a blind, fatalistic faith that, having succeeded in coming this far, we could not fail to get down. The moment became an end in itself.

There were many things savoured in this brief time. Even with our oxygen turned off we had no problem performing those summit obeisances, photographing the fading day (it's a wonderful place to be for sunset photographs), smiling behind our masks for the inevitable `I was there' picture. Willi wrapped the kata given him by Ang Dorje about the flag pole and planted Andy Bakewell's crucifix alongside it in the snow; Lhotse and Makalu, below us, were a contrast of sun-blazed snow etched against the darkness of evening shadow. We felt the lonely beauty of the evening, the immense roaring silence of the wind, the tenuousness of our tie to all below. There was a hint of fear, not for our lives, but of a vast unknown which pressed in upon us. A fleeting feeling of disappointment- that after all those dreams and questions this was only a mountain top-gave way to the suspicion that maybe there was something more, something beyond the three-dimensional form of the moment. If only it could be perceived.

But it was late. The memories had to be stored, the meanings taken down. The question of why we had come was not now to be answered, yet something up here must yield an answer, something only dimly felt, comprehended by senses reaching farther yet than the point on which we stood; reaching for understanding, which hovered but a few steps higher. The answers lay not on the summit of Everest, nor in the sky above it, but in the world to which we belonged and must now return.

Footprints in the snow told that Lute and Barrel had been here. We'd have a path to follow as long as light remained.

`Want to go first?' Willi asked. He began to coil the rope.

Looking down the corniced edge, I thought of the added protection of a rope from above. `Doesn't matter, Willi. Either way.'

'O.K. Why don't I go first then?' he said, handing me the coil. Paying out the rope as he disappeared below me I wondered, Is Unsoeld tired? It was hard to believe. Still he'd worked hard; he had a right to be weary. Starting sluggishly, I'd felt stronger as we climbed. So now we would reverse roles. Going up had been pretty much Willi's show; going down would be mine. I dropped the last coil and started after him.

Fifty feet from the top we stopped at a patch of exposed rock. Only the summit of Everest, shining pink, remained above the shadow sea. Willi radioed to Maynard Miller at Advance Base that we were headed for the South Col. It was 6.35 p.m.

We almost ran along the crest, trusting Lute and Barrel's track to keep us a safe distance from the cornice edge. Have to reach the South Summit before dark, I thought, or we'll never find the way. The sun dropped below the jagged horizon. We didn't need goggles any more. There was a loud hiss as I banged my oxygen bottle against the ice wall. Damn! Something's broken. I reached back and turned off the valve. Without oxygen, I tried to keep pace with the rope disappearing over the edge ahead. Vision dimmed, the ground began to move. I stopped till things cleared, waved my arms and shouted into the wind for Willi to hold up. The taut rope finally stopped him. I tightened the regulator, then turned the oxygen on. No hiss! To my relief it had only been jarred loose. On oxygen again, I could move rapidly. Up twenty feet, and we were on the South Summit. It was 7.15.

Thank God for the footprints. Without them, we'd have had a tough

time deciding which way to go. We hurried on, facing outward, driving our heels into the steep snow. By 7.30 it was dark. We took out the flashlight and resumed the descent. The batteries, dregs of the Expedition, had not been helped by our session with Emerson's diary the night before; they quickly faded. There was pitiful humour as Willi probed, holding the light a few inches off the snow to catch some sign of tracks. You could order your eyes to see, but nothing in the blackness complied.

We moved slowly now. Willi was only a voice and an occasional faint flicker of light to point the way. No fear, no worry, no strangeness, just complete absorption. The drive which had carried us to a nebulous goal was replaced by simple desire for survival. There was no time to dwell on the uniqueness of our situation. We climbed carefully, from years of habit. At a rock outcrop we paused. Which way? Willi groped to the right along a corniced edge. In my imagination, I filled in the void.

`No tracks over here,' Willi called.

`Maybe we should dig in here for the night.'

`I don't know. Dave and Girmi should be at 6.'

We shouted into the night, and the wind engulfed our call. A lull. Again we shouted. `Helloooo,' the wind answered. Or was it the wind?

`Hellooo,' we called once more.

`Hellooo,' came back faintly. That wasn't the wind!

`To the left, Willi.'

'O.K., go ahead.'

In the blackness I couldn't see my feet. Each foot groped cautiously, feeling its own way down, trusting to the pattern set by its predecessor. Slowly left, right, left, crampons biting into the snow, right, left, .. .

`Willeeee!' I yelled as I somersaulted into space. The rope came taut, and with a soft thud I landed.

`Seems to be a cornice there,' I called from beneath the wall. 'I'll belay you from here.'

Willi sleepwalked down to the edge. The dim outline of his foot wavered until it met my guiding hand. His arrival lacked the flair of my descent. It was well that the one of lighter weight had gone first.

Gusts buffeted from all directions, threatening to dislodge us from the slope. Above a cliff we paused, untied, cut the rope in half, and tied in again. It didn't help; even five feet behind I couldn't see Willi. Sometimes the snow was good, sometimes it was soft, sometimes it lay shallow over rocks so we could only drive our axes in an inch or two. With these psychological belays, we wandered slowly down, closer to the answering shouts. The wind was dying, and so was the flashlight, now no more than an orange glow illuminating nothing. The stars, brilliant above, cast no light on the snow. Willi's oxygen ran out. He slowed, suddenly feeling much wearier.

The voices were close now. Were they coming from those two black shapes on the snow? Or were those rocks?

`Shine your light down here,' a voice called.

`Where? Shine yours up here,' I answered.

`Don't have one,' came the reply.

Then we were with them-not Dave and Girmi, but Lute and Barrel. They were near exhaustion, shivering lumps curled on the snow. Barrel in particular was far gone. Anxious hungering for air through the previous night, and the near catastrophe when their tent caught fire in the morning, had left him tired before they even started. Determination got him to the top, but now he no longer cared. He only wanted to be left alone. Lute was also tired. Because of Barrel's condition he'd had to bear the brunt of the climbing labour. His eyes were painfully burned, perhaps by the fire, perhaps by the sun and wind. From sheer fatigue they had stopped thinking. Their oxygen was gone, except for a bit Lute had saved for Barrel; but they were too weak to make the change.

At 9.30 we were still a thousand feet above Camp 6. Willi sat down on the snow, and I walked over to get Lute's oxygen for Barrel. As I unscrewed Lute's regulator from the bottle, he explained why they were still there. Because of the stove fire that had sent them diving from the tent, they were an hour late in starting. It was 3.30 p.m. when they reached the summit. Seeing no sign of movement down the west side, they figured no one would be any later than they were. At 4.15 they started down. Fatigue slowed their descent. Just after dark

they had stopped to rest and were preparing to move when they heard shouts. Dave and Girmi, they thought. No-the sounds seemed to be coming from above. Willi and Tom! So they waited, shivering.

I removed Barrel's regulator from his empty bottle and screwed it into Lute's. We were together now, sharing the support so vigorously debated a week before. Lute would know the way back to their camp, even in the dark. All we had to do was help them down. Fumbling with unfeeling fingers, I tried to attach Barrel's oxygen hose to the regulator. Damn! Can't make the connection. My fingers scraped uncoordinately against cold metal. Try again. There it goes. Then, quickly, numb fingers clumsy, back into mittens. Feeling slowly returned, and pain. Then, the pain went and the fingers were warm again.

Willi remembered the Dexedrine I had dropped into my shirt pocket the evening before. I fished out two pills-one for Barrel and one for Lute. Barrel was better with oxygen, but why I had balked at his communal use of Lute's regulator, I cannot say. Lack of oxygen? Fatigue? It was fifteen hours since we'd started our climb. Or was it that my thoughts were too busy with another problem? We had to keep moving or freeze.

I led off. Lute followed in my footsteps to point out the route. Lost in the darkness sixty feet back on our ropes, Willi and Barrel followed. The track was more sensed than seen, but it was easier now, not so steep. My eyes watered from searching for the black holes punched in the snow by Lute's and Barrel's axes during their ascent. We walked to the left of the crest, three feet down, ramming our axes into the narrow edge. Thirty feet, and the rope came taut as Barrel collapsed in the snow, bringing the entire caravan to a halt. Lute sat down behind me. Got to keep moving. We'll never get there.

We had almost no contact with the back of the line. When the rope came taut, we stopped, when it loosened we moved on. Somewhere my oxygen ran out, but we were going too slow for me to notice the difference. Ought to dump the empty bottle, I thought, but it was too much trouble to take off my pack.

Heat lightning flashed along the plains to the east, too distant to light our way. Rocks that showed in the snow below seemed to get no closer as the hours passed. Follow the axe holes. Where'd they go? Not sure. There's another.

`Now where, Lute?'

`Can't see, Tom.' Lute said. `Can't see a damn thing. We've got to turn down a gully between some rocks.'

`Which gully. There's two or three.'

`Don't know, Tom.'

`Think, Lute. Try to remember. We've got to get to 6.'

`I don't know. I just can't see.'

Again and again I questioned, badgering, trying to extract some hint. But half blind and weary, Lute had no answer. We plodded on. The rocks came slowly closer.

Once the rope jerked tight, nearly pulling me off balance. Damn! What's going on? I turned and looked at Lute's dim form lying on the snow a few feet further down the Kangshung Face. His fall had been effectively if uncomfortably arrested when his neck snagged the rope between Willi and me.

We turned off the crest, toward the rocks. Tongues of snow pierced the cliffs below. But which one? It was too dangerous to plunge on. After midnight we reached the rocks. It had taken nearly three hours to descend four hundred feet, maybe fifteen minutes' worth by daylight.

Tired. No hope of finding camp in the darkness. No choice but to wait for day. Packs off. Willi and I slipped into our down parkas. In the dark, numb fingers couldn't start the zippers. We settled to the ground, curled as small as possible atop our pack frames. Lute and Barry were somewhere behind, apart, each alone. Willi and I tried hugging each other to salvage warmth, but my uncontrollable shivering made it impossible.

The oxygen was gone, but the mask helped a little for warmth. Feet, cooling, began to hurt. I withdrew my hands from the warmth -of my crotch and loosened crampon bindings and bootlaces, but my feet stayed cold. Willi offered to rub them. We removed boots and socks and planted both my feet against his stomach. No sensation returned.

Tired by the awkward position, and frustrated by the result, we gave it up. I slid my feet back into socks and boots, but couldn't tie them. I offered to warm Willi's feet. Thinking that his freedom from pain was due to a high tolerance of cold, he declined. We were too weary to realize the reason for his comfort.

The night was overpoweringly empty. Stars shed cold unshimmering light. The heat lightning dancing along the plains spoke of a world of warmth and flatness. The black silhouette of Lhotse lurked half-sensed, half-seen, still below. Only the ridge on which we were rose higher, disappearing into the night, a last lonely outpost of the world.

Mostly there was nothing. We hung suspended in a timeless void. The wind died, and there was silence. Even without wind it was cold. I could reach back and touch Lute or Barrel lying head to toe above me. They seemed miles away.

Unsignalled, unembellished, the hours passed. Intense cold penetrated, carrying with it the realization that each of us was completely alone. Nothing Willi could do for me or I for him. No team now, just each of us, imprisoned with his own discomfort, his own thoughts, his own will to survive.

Yet for me, survival was hardly a conscious thought. Nothing to plan, nothing to push for, nothing to do but shiver and wait for the sun to rise. I floated in a dreamlike eternity, devoid of plans, fears, regrets. The heat lightning, Lhotse, my companions, discomfort, all were there-yet not there. Death had no meaning, nor, for that matter, did life. Survival was no concern, no issue. Only a dulled impatience for the sun to rise tied my formless thoughts to the future.

About 4.00 the sky began to lighten along the eastern rim, baring the bulk of Kangchenjunga. The sun was slow in following, interminably slow. Not till after 5.oo did it finally come, its light streaming through the South Col, blazing yellow across the Nuptse Wall, then on to the white wave-crest of peaks far below. We watched as if our own life was being born again. Then as the cold yellow light touched us, we rose. There were still miles to go.

16. . . . Before I Sleep

The rest is like a photograph with little depth of field, the focused moments crystal sharp against a blurred background of fatigue. We descended the gully I had been unable to find in the dark. Round the corner, Dave and Girmi were coming toward us. They thought they heard shouts in the night and had started up, but their own calls were followed only by silence. Now, as they came in search of the bodies of Lute and Barry they saw people coming down-not just two, but four. Dave puzzled a moment before he understood.

The tents at Camp 6-and we were home from the mountain. Nima Dorje brought tea. We shed boots. I stared blankly at the marble-white soles of Willi's feet. They were cold and hard as ice. We filled in Emerson's diary for the last time, then started down.

With wind tearing snow from its rocky plain, the South Col was as desolate and uninviting as it had always been described. We sought shelter in the tents at Camp S for lunch, then emerged into the gale. Across the Geneva Spur, out of the wind, on to the open sweep of the Lhotse Face we plodded in sombre procession. Dave led gently, patiently; the four behind rocked along, feet apart to keep from falling. Only for Willi and me was this side of the mountain new. Like tourists we looked around, forgetting fatigue for the moment.

At Camp 4 we stopped to melt water, then continued with the setting sun, walking through dusk into darkness as Dave guided us among crevasses, down the Cwm. It was a mystery to me how he found the way. I walked along at the back, following the flashlight. Sometimes Willi stopped and I would nearly bump into him. We waited. while Dave searched, then moved on. No one complained.

At 10.30 P.M. we arrived at Advance Base. Dick, Barry, and Al were down from the Ridge, waiting. Frozen feet and Barrel's hands were thawed in warm water. Finally to bed, after almost two days. Short of a sleeping-bag. Willi and I shared one as best we could.

May 24 we were late starting, tired. Lute, Willi, and Barrel walked on thawed feet. It was too dangerous to carry them down through the Icefall. Willi, ahead of me on the rope, heeled down like an awkward clown. The codeine wasn't enough to prevent cries of pain when he stubbed his toes against the snow. I cried as I walked behind,

unharmed.

At Camp i Maynard nursed us like a mother hen, serving us water laboriously melted from ice samples drilled from the glacier for analysis. Then down through the Icefall, past Jake's grave-and a feeling of finality. It's all done. The dream's finished.

No rest. The next day, a grim grey one, we departed Base. From low-hanging clouds wet snow fell. Willi, Barrel, and Lute were loaded aboard porters to be carried down over the rocky moraine. It was easier walking.

At Gorak Shep we paused. On a huge boulder a Sherpa craftsman had patiently carved:

IN MEMORY OF JOHN E. BREITENBACH, AMERICAN MOUNT EVEREST EXPEDITION, 1963.

Clouds concealed the mountain that was Jake's grave.

As we descended, the falling snow gave way to a fine drizzle. There was nothing to see; just one foot, then another. But slowly a change came, something that no matter how many times experienced, is always new, like life. It was life. From ice and snow and rock, we descended to a world of living things, of green-grass and trees and bushes. There was no taking it for granted. Spring had come, and even the grey drizzle imparted a wet sheen to all that grew. At Pheriche flowers bloomed in the meadows.

Lying in bed, Willi and I listened to a sound that wasn't identifiable, so foreign was it to the place-the chopping whirr as a helicopter circled, searching for a place to land. In a flurry of activity Willi and Barrel were loaded aboard. The helicopter rose from the hilltop above the village and dipped into the distance. The chop-chop-chop of the blades faded, until finally the craft itself was lost in the massive backdrop. The departure was too unreal, too much a part of another world, to be really comprehended. Less than five days after they had stood on the summit ofEverest, Barrel and Willi were back in Kathmandu. For them the Expedition was ended. Now all that remained was weeks in bed, sitting, rocking in pain, waiting for toes to mummify to the time for amputation.

Up over barren passes made forbidding by mist and a chill wind, we travelled. Hard work. Then down through forests of rain-drenched rhododendrons, blossoming pastels of pink and lavender. Toes hurt. Two weeks to Kathmandu. Feet slipped on the muddy path.

Everything was wet.

We were finished. Everest was climbed; nothing to push for now. Existence knew only the instant, counting steps, falling asleep each time we stopped to rest beside the trail. Lester, Emerson, and I talked about motivation; for me it was all gone. It was a time of relaxation, a time when senses were tuned to perceive, but nothing was left to give.

Pleasure lay half-hidden beneath discomfort, fatigue, loneliness. Willi was gone. The gap where he had been was filled with a question: Why hadn't I known that his feet were numb? Surely I could have done something, if only ... I was too weary to know the question couldn't be resolved. Half of me seemed to have gone with him; the other half was isolated from my companions by an experience I couldn't share and by the feeling that something was ending that had come to mean too much. Talk of home, of the first evening in the Yak and Yeti Bar, of the reception that waited, was it really so important? Did it warrant the rush?

We'd climbed Everest. What good was it to Jake? To Willi, to Barrel? To Norman, with Everest all done now? And to the rest of us? What waits? What price less tangible than toes? There must be something more to it than toiling over the top of another, albeit expensive, mountain. Perhaps there was something of the nobility-that-is-man in it somewhere, but it was hard to be sure.

Yes, it satisfied in a way. Not just climbing the mountain, but the entire effort--the creating something, the few of us moulding it from the beginning. With a lot of luck we'd succeeded. But what had we proved?

Existence on a mountain is simple. Seldom in life does it come any simpler: survival, plus the striving toward a summit. The goal is solidly, three-dimensionally thereyou can see it, touch it, stand upon it-the way to reach it well defined, the energy of all directed toward its achievement. It is this simplicity that strips the veneer off civilization and makes that which is meaningful easier to come bythe pleasure of deep companionship, moments of uninhibited humour, the tasting of hardship, sorrow, beauty, joy. But it is this very simplicity that may prevent finding answers to the questions I had asked as we approached the mountain.

Then I had been unsure that I could survive and function in a world so foreign to my normal existence. Now I felt at home here, no longer overly afraid. Each step toward Kathmandu carried me back toward

the known, yet toward many things terribly unknown, toward goals unclear, to be reached by paths undefined.

Beneath fatigue lurked the suspicion that the answers I sought were not to be found on a mountain. What possible difference could climbing Everest make? Certainly the mountain hadn't been changed. Even now wind and falling snow would have obliterated most signs of our having been there. Was I any greater for having stood on the highest place on earth? Within the wasted figure that stumbled weary and fearful back toward home there was no question about the answer to that one.

It had been a wonderful dream, but now all that lingered was the memory. The dream was ended.

Everest must join the realities of my existence, commonplace and otherwise. The goal, unattainable, had been attained. Or had it? The questions, many of them, remained. And the answers? It is strange how when a dream is fulfilled there is little left but doubt.

Never let success hide its emptiness from you, achievement its nothingness, toil its desolation. And so keep alive the incentive to push on further, that pain in the soul which drives us beyond ourselves.

Whither? That I don't know. That I don't ask to know.

-DAG HAMMARSKJOLD

THE MOUNTAINEERS, founded in 1906, is a nonprofit outdoor activity and conservation club, whose mission is "to explore, study, preserve, and enjoy the natural beauty of the outdoors. . . ." Based in Seattle, Washington, the club is now the third-largest such organization in the United States, with 15,000 members and five branches throughout Washington State.

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St. Louis-born Thomas Hornbein has been an avid mountaineer since his early teens. His climbing adventures range from Pakistan, Nepal, China, and Africa to Longs Peak in Colorado. A resident of Bellevue, Washington, Dr. Hornbein is Professor and past Chairman of the Department of Anesthesiology, and Professor, Department of Physiology and Biophysics at the University of Washington School of Medicine. He continues to climb and pursue interests in human adaptation to high altitude.

The Mountaineers
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